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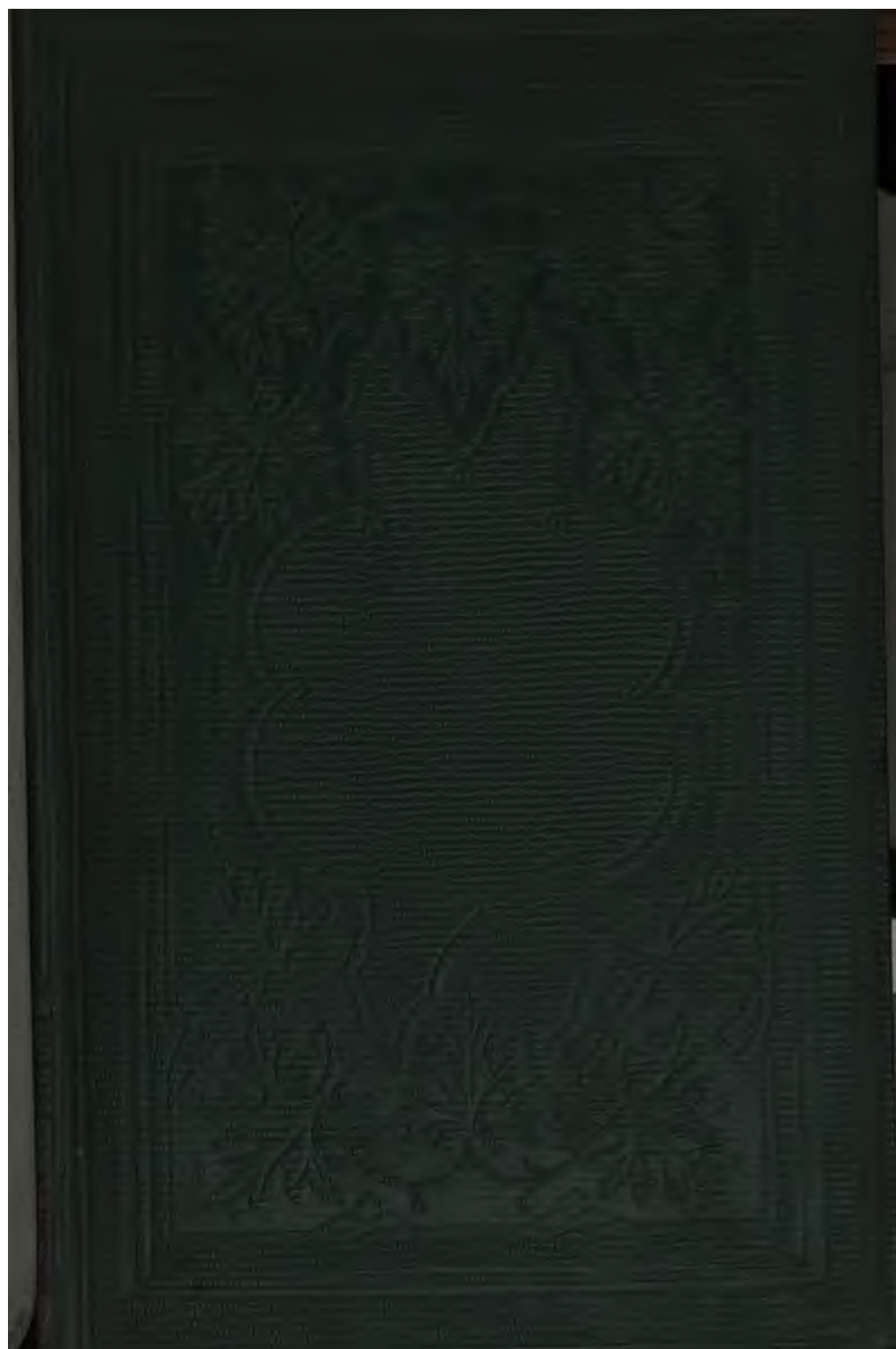
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R I V E R S T O N .

BY

GEORGIANA M. CRAIK.

"The power, whether of painter or poet, to describe rightly what he calls an ideal thing, depends upon its being *to him* not an ideal but a real thing. No man ever did or ever will work well, but either from actual sight, or sight of faith."—
RUSKIN.

"Forgive me where I fall in truth,
And in Thy wisdom make me wise."
TENNYSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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RIVERSTON.

CHAPTER I.

OUT OF PLACE.

I HAD been a fortnight in London ; I had answered nearly a score of advertisements for governesses, and had advertised myself ; I had been directed to call personally, and I had called, at more than a dozen houses, but I was still without a situation ; and when the fortnight closed I felt the only result of it had been to teach me, far better than I knew at its commencement, how hard it would be to obtain what I desired.

It was to me a most dispiriting search. Very ignorant of the world and its doings, I had come to London, thinking that, amidst so many advertisers

as the columns of the newspapers showed to me, the selection of a situation such as I wished would be a matter of comparatively little difficulty. I was not prepared for what I quickly found I had to meet. I was not prepared to face vulgarity and ignorance, and bear myself as a dependent before them. I was not prepared to sit humbly and listen to purse-proud insolence—to smile, and flatter, and solicit—to mock my whole sense of self-respect by feigning a reverence for what I despised, or an acquiescence in what my soul rebelled against. Again and again I had turned away from the houses I had entered with my cheek on fire, feeling, as I walked back to my solitary room, that it would be easier to pass my life in a garret, and sew to earn my bread, easier almost to sing ballads in the street, with the free sky above me, than to recross the thresholds I had passed, and consent to live the crushed down, despicable thing that was to constitute the governess they asked for.

It was cheerless to be alone in London with this only errand—to get engaged somewhere as a

governess. The streets, as I traversed them day by day, began to grow hateful to me. In my deepening anxiety, in my increasing eagerness to seek, and doubt to obtain, dispirited, wrestling between such keen pain and pride—though God knows the *pride* might well have been crushed out of me—the desire to see some one face amongst the countless faces round me that I knew grew to an almost feverish strength. But I was acquainted with no living creature in London: my friends—what few I had—were far away: what I had to do, and what I had to bear, were to be done and borne alone.

It was not a gentle initiation into life, and I felt its hardness, and loneliness, and degradation—for it *was* degradation at times—keenly and bitterly; but my decision to become a governess had not been lightly formed, nor was I prepared lightly to abandon it. I believed that I was competent to fill the post I sought; I knew that I could teach; I knew that I was conscientious, and would be painstaking; I knew that I was in appearance and feeling and manner, as I was by

birth and education, a lady. If I was more than these so much the better; so much the stronger was the reason why I should neither despond nor draw back. And the resolution that I came to when the fortnight closed was—not certainly to do the last—not if possible, and by God's help to do the first.

It was the middle of the third week of my search, when one morning I came upon this advertisement in the *Times*:—

“Governess Wanted.—A lady resident in the country is desirous to meet with a governess for her little girl. She will be required to teach English, French, German or Italian, and Music. Address to E. M., 18, ——— Place, Regent's Park.”

I had learnt the delusiveness of too many of those advertisements which offer comfortable houses in lieu of handsome salaries: the simplicity of this one pleased me: I liked it the more that there were no promises in it. I noted down the address forthwith, and despatched my application by the next post.

For two days I had no reply: upon the third I

received a note requesting me to call at the address already given. The note was courteously worded, the handwriting firm and free, yet delicate and womanly: it excited me to lose no time in seeking the interview that was offered, and I went that same afternoon.

The house to which I had been directed I found to be a large and handsome one overlooking the park. I was told to ask for Mrs. Maurice. On doing so, I was immediately ushered up-stairs into one of two very handsome drawing-rooms opening into one another, where a lady sitting by the fire rose up to receive me.

"Mrs. Maurice?" I asked, and she bowed, and motioning to a chair requested me to be seated.

She was a large, handsome, kindly-looking woman. I was beginning to read faces, and I liked the look of hers.

"I had a note from you this morning," I said, and I handed her the letter she had written me. She glanced at the address, and at once said cordially—

"Oh yes! I am only sorry that I was not able to

give you an answer sooner. Your letter—I think I have it by me here ;” and she went to the drawer of a small writing-table, and took out a packet of letters, from which in a few moments she selected mine and opened it. Then she looked up with a half smile—

“ I think I had better know your name ?”

“ Honor Haig.”

“ Haig !” she repeated, rather quickly. “ That is a Scotch name, I think ?”

“ My father was a Scotchman.”

“ Ah, well, that will not be against you !” she said smiling ; “ for my sister-in-law is a Scotchwoman herself. But ”—and she hesitated for an instant—

“ I am afraid you are rather young.”

“ I am past twenty.”

“ Twenty—hm,” and she looked down into the fire and seemed to consider. Then, after a moment or two, raising her head—

“ I would rather that you were a little older, certainly ; but still, if we agree upon other points, I do not think your age will be any insuperable objection. Let me see,” and she consulted my letter for

a moment. "You have had some experience in teaching?"

"I have been engaged as English governess in a school in Devonshire from last Christmas until a few weeks since."

"And you left in order to come to London?"

She bent her eyes with a penetrating look upon me. I understood what her question meant, and answered according to my interpretation of it—

"I left partly because the work was more than I had strength for, but chiefly because, for private reasons, I did not wish to reside any longer in Devonshire."

She bowed slightly; but when, after a moment's silence, she spoke again, I thought I detected a shade of mistrust both in her tone and manner.

"You could refer me to the lady who conducts this school?" she asked.

"Certainly," I replied readily, and I added—for I had neither need nor desire to appear unnecessarily reserved—"when I say that I had private reasons for leaving Devonshire, I do not mean by using the word to imply that there was any thing

I wished to conceal. I left simply because I had no longer any home there, and because I thought it was better to seek elsewhere for a situation as governess, than continue against my will to reside in a stepfather's house."

Thus much, Reader, I have told you of the commencement of our interview, because it gives you such information regarding myself and my previous history as it is desirable for you to know; to detail the rest with equal faithfulness would be both tedious and unnecessary.

The particulars that I gathered from Mrs. Maurice were these. The lady whose advertisement I had answered was the wife of her brother, Mr. Wynter. She lived in Sussex, and it was for her youngest child, a girl of nine years old, that she desired to engage a governess. Should I obtain the situation, I was expected to undertake the entire education of this girl in all those branches which had been specified in the advertisement. This I was willing to undertake, with, however, a partial exception in regard to music, for I was by no means a first-rate musician. What I knew I

knew well, and could teach to others, but I had little power of execution. I told Mrs. Maurice so frankly. The salary that was offered was sixty guineas.

“And I need scarcely add,” Mrs. Maurice said, though with a slight hesitation of manner that seemed to me to contradict her opening words, and God knows there *was* need to say it, if it was true — “I need scarcely say that you would be considered in all respects as one of my brother’s family. Two of my nieces are grown up; the eldest is much about your own age, so that you would not be without companions; and I can answer for the earnest desire my sister would have to do every thing in her power to make you feel that you were amongst friends.”

She said this when our interview was nearly closing. She had been courteous and kind throughout. By the tone of every thing she had said, I knew that I was not looked down upon as an inferior; but even though I felt this, and though my heart had expanded in the warmth that her kindness gathered round me, yet when the *spoken* assu-

rance came, it thrilled me with so strong a feeling of kindling gratitude—for recollect, Reader, how I had starved for a word of frank and honest kindness—that in the fulness of the emotion I could not be altogether silent.

“I have to thank you,” I said, as I rose up, “for more than I have received from any one since I came here. Whether I succeed or fail, your kindness has given me new courage. I shall not soon forget it.”

I had already given her my references, and heard and replied to all she had to say. I was on the point of taking my leave when I spoke thus; but as I was going she interposed to stop me.

“Miss Haig, I think and hope that we may come to an agreement together,” she said. “I will tell you frankly, that I like what I have seen of you.”

She held out her hand, and it closed with a warm, kindly pressure over mine.

“You shall hear from me as soon as possible,” she said; “and I hope very much,” she smiled as she looked up to me, “that at our next meeting

I may be able to give you an assurance which I think will be a better gift than only a little courage."

There was sympathy and compassion in the cheerful voice; I left her and commenced my homeward walk, feeling for the first time for many days, that despite the winter's frost, there was warmth and sunshine in the air.

It was nearly a week before I heard a second time from Mrs. Maurice. Her note simply asked me to call again; but when I went the first words that she met me with were these—

"Miss Haig, if you will accept this situation in my sister's family, I have much pleasure in offering it to you."

It was the close of the third week in January. I had few preparations to make; it was settled between us that on the coming Tuesday morning I should set forward on my journey.

CHAPTER II.

JOURNEYING SOUTH.

It was bitterly cold in the grey twilight of that January morning, as I took my place in the Hastings stage-coach. We had no Hastings railway in those days, and the journey was a long ten hours' one. The coach was full, too—even inconveniently so; for though the inside number did not exceed the usual four, my three companions were all of such a goodly size, that it needed my almost constant exertion to retain the one little corner of space that was absolutely necessary to me against their mountainous encroachments.

Long before we approached Hastings the night had fallen—a cloudless, moonless, starry night; and, through the breath-dimmed windows, it was

difficult to catch even the dim outlines of the country across which we passed. Here and there I saw the looming shadow of a hill; nearer, I caught the occasional sight of water, shimmeringly reflecting the frosty stars; still nearer, there were bare hedgerows and lines of naked trees, with skeleton branches interlacing, and shutting out from us even the faint light of the moonless sky. Beyond these I could discern nothing; and, when we drove at last into the old hill-sheltered town of Hastings, even the sea was hidden from me, and I only heard the sound of its deep, smothered, sullen roll as our coach stopped at the inn, and we alighted.

I had scarcely stepped upon the pavement when a man wrapped in a coachman's great-coat came up to me and touched his hat—

“I beg your pardon, ma'am; I've come from Mr. Wynter's.”

“Very well. How am I to get there?”

“I've got a chaise here, miss. If you'll go in out of the cold I'll see to your luggage. There's a room ready with a fire in it.”

"Thank you. How far have we to go?"

"Well, it's not much short of nine mile, ma'am. It'll take us a good hour to do it."

"I shall be ready in a quarter of an hour."

I felt the cheering influence both of the blazing fire to which I was conducted, and of the hot tea that was brought to me. My limbs had got cramped in the crowded coach, and I was half benumbed with cold. I seemed, as I rested myself, both physically and mentally to begin to expand and thaw. Some anxious thoughts and some almost cowardly fears had been creeping in upon me latterly; but they had been born of the cold and fatigue and darkness, and they vanished now like spectres before the light and warmth. I was full again both of strength and hope, when at the close of the quarter of an hour I summoned my new friend, and by his directions took my seat in the carriage, which was already waiting in readiness before the door.

We drove rapidly through the lighted streets, and the clear frosty darkness of the night in a few moments was once more around us. Our way

lay westward, and the road we went wound near the sea. There was little for the eye to gaze on, for only a few faint sparkles of light lay on the water, and all the rest was one far expanse of unilluminated darkness ; but I liked the accompanying sound of the sea's solemn roar, and regretted when the road, as it did presently, parted from it at the southerly bend towards Beachy Head.

From this time the impenetrable night shut out the whole country from me, and I knew nothing further of the course our journey took, until at about half-past nine o'clock the sudden stopping of the carriage told me that we had reached its termination, and looking eagerly out, as the door was thrown open, I found myself upon the threshold of the broad, well-lighted hall of Riverston.

No one except the servant who admitted me was visible when I first entered, but almost immediately a second—a woman—advanced towards me, and relieved me of my burden of wrappings ; and I was on the point of accepting her invitation to be shown to my room, when a door before us was

somewhat violently thrown open, and a child's voice broke quickly out—

“ Is that Miss Haig ? Mamma says, if it's Miss Haig she wants her to come in here.”

“ Yes, it is Miss Haig. Shall I come with you ?” I asked the girl.

I went up towards her ; she surveyed me all over for a moment with large speculating eyes.

“ Yes,” she said rather musingly ; and without any shyness she reached me her hand. I took it in mine, and we entered the drawing-room together.

It was a spacious room, bright with fire and candle light, with gilded picture frames and mirrors ; rich-coloured with the glow of crimson curtains, and the dark polish of walnut furniture. Its sole occupant was a lady, who, standing before the fire as we came in, scarcely waited for our entrance before she advanced to meet me, exclaiming at the same moment, with a slightly hurried nervousness of tone—

“ Miss Haig ?—oh, how do you do ?—I'm very glad you have come. We were almost afraid that the cold might have prevented you—and

indeed, my dear," for, as her momentary embarrassment passed away, a kindly cordiality broke forth in her—"indeed, I am sure you are half-frozen: come away to the fire and warm yourself; and Effie, ring the bell, darling."

She took my hand and led me to the fire, and made me sit down in what appeared from its position to be the chair which she herself had occupied.

"I am not very cold," I said—and indeed there was a glow of warmth within that made the smarting of my fingers little heeded. "Your kindness in providing for my comfort at Hastings has made the last part of my journey not at all unpleasant."

"But it is a long way to come in such weather," she said kindly. "I am sure all day I have been quite uneasy about you; for you know any one not very used to travelling is so likely to take cold in these dreadful stage-coaches. Hester," for a servant came in at this moment, "I should like tea immediately—and, my dear," she turned again to me, "I think, if you take a cup of tea

before you go up-stairs, it will do you good. You won't mind just putting off your bonnet here—will you? There is nobody to see you but Effie and me.”

I was not likely to refuse the friendly invitation, it was so long since any one had cared whether I was warm or cold: with willing obedience I unloosed my cloak and took my bonnet off.

“I will take them,” said a clear serious voice at my side, and turning my head I saw the child Effie standing by my chair. She had left the room or been hidden in some corner of it since I entered: I had scarcely had time to bestow a second thought upon her from our first meeting until she re-appeared now. She put out her hand as she spoke to take possession of my garments, but I prevented her intention by enclosing it within my own.

“Is it you who are to be my pupil, Effie?” I asked.

Her answer was a half smile, and when the smile was passed, a slow dreamy “Yes.” At the same time the small hand began to twist itself

out of mine, and, not desiring to detain her by force, I at once freed it; but she did not leave me as I expected that she would.

"Oh yes! Effie has been in great excitement about your coming," Mrs. Wynter said, smiling. "I am sure you have been the whole subject of her thoughts for days past. There has been nothing but 'Miss Haig' talked about for the last week."

"I can return the compliment in part," I said. "Effie has been in *my* thoughts too, if not upon my lips, a good deal during these last days. So I hope," and I addressed this to her, "as we have thought so much about one another before our meeting, that we mean to be good friends now?"

She stood by my side, slowly feeling over and fingering my hand, turning round a ring that I wore, and in other ways amusing herself at my expense. I had a good opportunity for observing her. She was very handsome, of a kind of beauty that was very pleasant to me—low-browed and dark-haired, with large grey eyes, dark with fringed lashes, and all luminous with changing

lights ; a complexion soft, clear, and pale, with a faint dash of olive in it ; a contour classically beautiful—broad at the forehead and narrowing gradually to the chin. It was undoubtedly a face *outwardly* eloquent at least both of intellect and strong feeling.

“ Oh yes ! I hope indeed that Effie will be a good girl,” Mrs. Wynter said. “ But I must tell you frankly, Miss Haig, that you will find she wants a good deal of training and bringing into order ; for there have been no very regular lessons for her of late—from various causes—and I am afraid she has got a little too wild.”

“ It is all Sydney’s fault for going away,” Effie broke in. “ She used to teach me”—this explanation was to me ; “ and she is gone to Scotland.”

“ Yes, Sydney—that is my second daughter,” Mrs. Wynter said—“ used to take principal charge of Effie ; but she is staying with a relation now—with her grandmother—in Edin’burgh. And my eldest daughter, Helen, has been a good deal occupied with other things lately.”

"Helen is going to be married," Effie said bluntly.

"Not exactly *going* to be, Effie," her mother interposed.

"She has been engaged for some time," she explained to me, "to our young clergyman here—Mr. Beresford ; but we are hardly thinking of the marriage taking place yet. But Effie, my dear, you are letting Miss Haig hold her bonnet all this time."

The clock over the fireplace struck ten before our meal was concluded, and immediately after a nurse appeared to summon Effie away to bed. When the table was cleared, Mrs. Wynter and I again returned to our seats beside the fire.

She had some time before informed me that Mr. Wynter and her daughter were dining out ; "I think," she said now, "after your long journey I must not keep you up to see them to-night. Helen was very sorry not to be at home when you came ; but there is a great gathering of people at present at one of our friend's houses near here—a sort of prolongation of a Christmas party—and

wherever there is much gaiety going on," she said, with something between a smile and a sigh, "Helen is generally a good deal in request."

It needed little insight to perceive, slight as my acquaintance with Mrs. Wynter yet was, that few subjects of conversation could be started in which she would take so strong an interest as in any thing relating to her own children. I did not hesitate, therefore, when we were again established round the fire, so to direct our talk as to lead her to tell me further concerning her family.

"These three daughters are your only children?" I asked.

"Oh no!" she said quickly; and a bright smile, that faded away next moment into a touching expression of quiet sorrow, passed over her face. "Oh no! I have a son; my eldest child—he is in the navy. I *had* two," and her voice dropped.

"The other was younger?" I asked, after a moment's silence.

"Much younger—oh yes! he was seven years

younger than Frank. He was to be a sailor, too ; he had just gone upon his first voyage when—when he was taken away.”

“ At sea ? ” I inquired.

“ Oh yes—at sea ! ” she said sadly, and her eyes were raised for an instant to my face with a timid, wistful appeal for sympathy. We were silent for a moment or two ; and then, as though the temptation to speak of him had overcome her, she began in her gentle way to tell me all the story of his life and death—of the love that had been lavished on him, and of the parting when he went to sea—that proved to be the final parting upon earth.

“ Oh, Miss Haig ! ” she said, “ it was like cutting my life in two when I lost him. The half of all the love I ever gave to any one on earth was his. It was not that he was better than my other children, but—but he loved *me* as none of the rest of them ever did. When I heard that he was dead——”

She broke off abruptly, and her hands fell down clasped upon her knee. There was something in

the mournful powerlessness of the action, so indicative of broken-down sorrow as it was, more pathetic to me than any words she could have used. It moved me to do what was unusual with me, to show more than passive sympathy with her. She took my hand into hers as I laid it over them, and held it with a kind of eager pressure.

"Thank you, dear," she whispered ; and, when a few moments had passed, she looked up with a feeble glimmering smile, and said ; "I have so much left to be thankful for, and God must know best. Even at the most it is for such a few years, and my Willie——"

She did not bring her sentence to an end ; with the name she loved so dearly lingering on her lips, she let the final words remain unspoken.

The stroke of another hour was the first interruption our conversation met with. Mrs. Wynter started up at the sound, and, breaking off in the midst of what she was saying, exclaimed quickly—

"Oh, my dear ! here I am keeping you up talking, when I am sure you ought to be resting in

bed. I really did not notice how the time was going."

She took a bed-room candle from a side-table, and we left the room together ; and, crossing the entrance hall, ascended a broad wainscoted spiral staircase, around whose massive centre pole a heavy oaken balustrade wound, dark and richly carved, until it terminated in a group of sculptured figures on the threshold of a gallery, that branched off in a long line right and left, and was again crossed at one extremity by a second passage. It was in this last that I found my room lay.

As Mrs. Wynter opened the door, my eye was met by a glow of firelight falling warmly upon white bed-curtains, and gleaming brightly on an opposite mirror. It was a small octagonal room, and the light entirely filled it : there were no dim corners—no obscure recesses ; all cheerily bright and warm it lay before me—a pleasant picture of comfort on that cold winter's night.

"My dear, you must ring for any thing you want, and I hope you will be warm and comfortable," my kind conductress said, as she put my

caudle on the table. "And now I'll say good-night, and not keep you out of bed any longer."

She came to me and took my hand, and then the kind heart expanded again—

"My dear, I am very glad you have come : I am sure we shall get on very nicely : I hope we shall be able to make you feel happy amongst us. There, now, good-night !"

With the half-timid nervousness that came frequently over her, she bent towards me and dropped a fluttering kiss upon my cheek ; then, smiling, she went away ; and, as the door closed upon her gentle little figure, I felt that I had already gained one friend at Riverston.

The day had given birth to too many thoughts for me to sleep soon. As I lay awake, my ear presently caught the approaching sounds of carriage wheels, followed in a few moments by the loud ringing of a bell, and the momentary commotion of an arrival : half an hour later, there were steps upon the stairs and in the gallery, and the tones of a clear voice reached me, carelessly singing amidst its talking some gay snatches of a song ;

then there were good-nights spoken, and the closing of doors : but every sound throughout the house had long been hushed, and the last embers of my fire were burnt out, before the sleep I sought at length visited me.

CHAPTER III.

IT BEGINS TO THAW.

WHEN I found my way to the breakfast-room next morning, there were only two of the family assembled ; the one was Effie—the other, who, at my first sight of her, was sitting crouched on the rug before the fire, I had no difficulty in guessing to be Helen. She turned round as I opened the door, and starting up with a slight laugh at being detected in such a posture, came frankly towards me, and offered me her hand.

“Miss Haig,” she exclaimed, “you must let me make my excuses to you. You don’t know how sorry I was that we were engaged from home last night. I assure you I was quite grieved ; I was more than half-inclined to let papa go without me when I heard that you were coming.”

I was by no means particularly taken with this address. That Miss Wynter should make an apology for her absence on my arrival, was an excess of politeness that was little called for; nor did the manner with which her speech was delivered please me better than its matter. The effort to be amiable was too visible in it. I did not thank her for her courtesy, for I did not believe in the sincerity with which it was offered.

"It was fortunate you did not stay," I said, "or you would have gained, I am afraid, a poor equivalent for the pleasures you gave up. As it is, you see, you have secured both me and your dinner."

My answer seemed to perplex her: as she was not ready immediately with any rejoinder beyond a rather uncertain laugh, I turned from her, and had accomplished my greeting to Effie before she spoke again.

"Are you not cold?" she asked then. "I am sure you must be, for I was really quite frozen in getting up this morning. I was just thawing myself when you came in," and she laughed.

"Well, go on thawing yourself," I said. "If

you make my presence an interruption to such a pleasant occupation I shall feel that I had better have stayed in my room."

"Will you sit here, then?" and she wheeled a chair to the side of the fire, laughingly curling herself up again upon the rug as I took possession of it, and proceeding to rub her hands together before the blaze.

She was a pretty creature certainly. As I sat looking at her bright face, my first feeling of irritation against her began rapidly to subside. She was fairer than Effie, and indeed bore little resemblance to her. Regular features, blue eyes, brown hair, and sparkingly beautiful complexion, made up a face which was strikingly pretty, but which yet, I thought, scarcely promised a long preservation of its charm; for its beauty lay almost wholly in its delicate form and colouring, and but little in its expression, which, though full of animation, was very destitute either of depth or real sweetness. Not only as a piece of sculpture, but far more as an index of character, the face was to my mind infinitely inferior to Effie's.

But still it was a pretty thing to look at—so young, so bright, so beautifully coloured.

“What a dreadful journey you must have had yesterday!” she exclaimed, recovering from her first slight repulse, and addressing me again in the somewhat exaggerated style in which she seemed fond of indulging. “Were you not almost dead with cold? I assure you, when I came home after only our short drive, I was quite numbed.”

“It was cold enough certainly, but I was warmly wrapped up. I had not on an evening dress, like you.”

“Well, that of course makes a difference!” she exclaimed earnestly; “because you know, however warm our cloaks may be, we can’t venture when we are dressed to wrap them closely round us, and then the air creeps in at a dozen little crevices upon our poor bare arms and necks. Oh, Miss Haig, don’t you think it is very foolish to wear low dresses in winter?”

“Very.”

“Well, I was just saying that last night! I was

telling the girls at Clifton that I was going to appear at the next party I went to in a high dress—but you can't think what a storm I raised !”

“ I daresay. Why did you say so ? ”

“ Why ?—oh, I don't know !—just *pour passer le temps*, I suppose,” she said laughing, after an instant's hesitation. “ Oh, Miss Haig ! I shall certainly get afraid of you if you demand a reason from me for every piece of folly I commit.”

“ I beg your pardon, but I thought you had put this forward as a piece of wisdom.”

“ Well, so I did, perhaps ; but then if you thought it folly,” she stopped a moment—“ as you did—did you not ? ” she asked, looking up and laughing, and then leaving the broken sentence unfinished. But the last words had been spoken so simply and naturally, that, in my liking for their tone, I forgave the girl her little affectations.

“ I have no concern with *your* follies,” I said, laughing ; “ it is only Effie's that I intend to busy myself about.”

"Do you hear that, Effie?" Helen exclaimed gaily; but Effie's great eyes, as she stood opposite me, were fixed upon my face, and she took no notice of her sister's address. "Effie, do you hear?" Helen reiterated. "Miss Haig is not going to allow an atom of folly to remain in you. Now, what do you think will be left when all the folly is gone—seriously, now, Effie?"

She stretched out a hand, and caught her sister round the waist; but, with an imperturbability that rather amazed me, Effie still vouchsafed no answer, nor in any way betrayed the slightest consciousness that she was addressed. It was impossible to know, however, whether she was either sulky or angry, for not the shadow of a change appeared upon her handsome face.

"Oh, you obstinate child!" Helen exclaimed, letting her go not over gently. "Miss Haig, I am sure I hope you will consider obstinacy a folly, and get *that* out of Effie; for so much of it as she has I never saw in any child in my life."

"Then beware of telling her so," I said. "I never knew obstinacy cured by accusations."

Helen's blue eyes opened upon me for an instant, then, suddenly starting up, she broke out, laughing—

“Miss Haig, I'll have nothing to do with you ! You are so sensible that you perfectly frighten me. There, Effie, go away to her—I'll never interfere between you,” and, pushing the child towards me, away she went.

I had no idea of petting Effie for being obstinate. She had not behaved amiably; and, though I hardly wished to commence so early with a reproof, I still thought it advisable in some way to note my disapproval. I prepared, therefore, to bestow a grave look upon her; but when I raised my eyes, something strangely earnest and touchingly searching in hers made my intention melt away. Their silent pleading tugged at my heart. I hardly knew if I did right or wrong, but I raised my hand and smoothed back the heavy, curling hair from her brow. She never moved her eyes from me, but as I touched her a slow dreamy smile stole over her face.

“Come away to the window,” she said quietly

the next moment ; and I rose up without any words, and, taking her offered hand, accompanied her.

Helen, too, joined us again.

"This is only the side of the house: both the back and front views are prettier," she said. "We see nothing from this window except the hill, and not the best view even of that."

Helen's "nothing" had to be taken with limitations. The hill by no means composed the whole of the view. There was a foreground of smooth grass-plot belted with evergreens: there was to the right a gloom of tall Scotch firs, raising their dark-clothed heads high towards heaven: there was on the left the promise of a garden abounding in flower-beds and green-house beauty. There was this in addition to the hill; but the hill alone was rich in loveliness. It was a low gently-swelling eminence, broken in its ascent into soft waving undulations, its whole extent bare of tree or shrub, but clothed from head to foot with a close grassy carpeting, which was scarcely green, but shaded over with soft misty whiteness; browsing sheep dotted it here and there, and the whole, as I looked

forth, lay with the still richness of summer beauty, shadowless in the full sunlight. It warmed me with its loveliness: gazing, I forgot that frost was nipping the evergreen leaves, and sucking the dew from the parched earth.

I did not leave the window until I was summoned from it to be introduced to Mr. Wynter, a ceremony which was immediately followed by the appearance of breakfast. Mr. Wynter was the picture of a country gentleman. Large, stout, and healthy-looking, he ate heartily and spoke little. I set him down as a quiet, phlegmatic personage, who would probably trouble me as little as I should meddle with him. While we ate and talked, he ate and studied his newspapers: when breakfast was over, he gathered up two or three letters that he had allowed to lie unopened beside him during the meal, and withdrawing with them left us in possession of the apartment.

We gathered then for a few moments round the fire. I was on the point of inquiring of Mrs. Wynter when and where my instructions to Effie were to commence, when, as the words were upon

my lips, Helen broke in in her usual enthusiastic manner—

“Mamma, did you ever see such exquisite hair? Look at these curls—are they not perfectly lovely?” and she suddenly reached at me, and caught up a handful of those ornaments. “Oh, they are beautiful, Miss Haig! If I could do my hair as you do, I would never let a hairdresser touch my head again as long as I lived! Mamma, is it not charming?”

“It is very pretty,” Mrs. Wynter said—“only it makes her look very young.”

The last portion of the sentence was spoken rather demurringly: it made me suspect for the first time that the style in which I dressed my hair was perhaps scarcely suited to my present position. It was a very simple arrangement: the hair was merely parted through the centre, and gathered in curls—it curled naturally—over each shoulder, shortening up to the brow, and I had worn it thus for many years; but it dawned upon me, as Mrs. Wynter spoke, that something less simple and youthful might perhaps be better suited to me now. I turned to her and said—

"I never thought about my hair ; but, if you think it makes me look too young, I am quite willing to alter it."

"Miss Haig, hold your tongue!" Helen exclaimed. "Alter it ! why, it would be a perfect sin to touch a single hair of it. Now, *mia madre*, say it would ? I know you think it in your heart."

"Well, Nelly, it almost would be a pity, I think."

"Ah, I knew you would say so ! Think if these curls were mine what your feelings would be. Oh dear ! I never thought my own hair was so ugly before;" and, with mock dissatisfaction, Helen looked in the glass at her thick glossy plaits. "Miss Haig, if I was only a single degree less amiable than I am——"

"My dear Nelly," Mrs. Wynter remonstrated.

"Mamma, it is perfectly true. If I was not more amiable than almost any other person I am acquainted with——"

In what way this excessive amiability was supposed to be displaying itself I was left to conjecture; for, precisely at this moment, Helen's speech was

a second time interrupted by an exclamation from Effie, and turning round I found that our party had been silently increased by the entrance of a gentleman, who, as soon as he was perceived, was familiarly greeted, though with very different degrees of cordiality, both by Helen and her mother.

"Ah, Edward, is that you?" Mrs. Wynter exclaimed, and with her gentle smile she went forward to meet him; while Helen, after one glance round, dropping into the chair which she had drawn to the fire for me before breakfast, addressed him as he came towards her with a cool—not to say uncivil—

"Well, Mr. Beresford, this is an early visit."

"It was my only chance of seeing you all day," he said.

There was no mistaking *his* eagerness: he came towards her, and stooped over her chair as if he had eyes and ears for no other person in the room. I do not believe, near as I was to Helen, that he was even conscious of my presence until Mrs. Wynter obliged him to take notice of it, by introducing us to one another.

He was a mild, gentlemanly-looking young man, with a quiet pleasing manner, and a gentle and kind expression of face. We exchanged no words together; for, though he turned to me upon our introduction with a courteous bow, I felt that his thoughts were so evidently engaged elsewhere, that the most charitable course I could pursue towards him would be to keep my lips closed. I returned his bow, therefore, and was mute; and in another moment he was again devotedly bending over Helen's chair.

"My dear," Mrs. Wynter said, in reply to the request which I now succeeded in making with regard to myself and Effie, "if you will excuse me for five minutes, I will come back and take you to the schoolroom. Effie, run away and see that your books are ready, and Miss Haig will come to you immediately."

I had no desire to intrude upon the lovers' *tête-à-tête*; I did, therefore, the utmost I could, when I was left alone with them, to get out of their way, by retreating to my former station at the window, and there amusing myself with turning over the

books that lay on a small table before it. The room, however, was not a large one, and I could not avoid hearing their conversation.

"So you had Captain Carlyon last night," Mr. Beresford was saying. "I suppose he is regarded as somewhat of a star at Clifton?"

"Captain Carlyon? I am sure I saw nothing star-like about him; unless it is a characteristic of stars to be rather noisier and vainer than the rest of the world," Helen said flippantly.

Her tone struck me with some amazement. This Captain Carlyon's name had been mentioned by her many times during breakfast, in a manner very different certainly from the one she chose to assume in speaking of him now. However, it was no concern of mine; so, after a momentary glance at her, I looked down upon my books again.

"Yet I should imagine there was something in him," Mr. Beresford said quietly. "Henry Wetherall would scarcely speak so warmly of him as he does, if he was nothing more than vain and noisy."

"Oh, well, he may be a genius for any thing I

know!" Helen exclaimed rather pettishly. "I don't pretend to dive into people's characters at first sight."

Perhaps Mr. Beresford considered that the subject he had chosen was not one that interested Helen, or possibly it did not much interest himself; at any rate he quitted it abruptly.

"I have a long walk before me," he said. "I am going to Falklands."

"And you mean to walk! dear me, Edward, what a foolish thing to do!" she exclaimed.

"But how can I help it, when poor Hero is lame?" he asked.

"Oh! I forgot about Hero's lameness. But surely you could have one of our horses? I would lend you mine if you liked."

"Thank you," he said smilingly, and looking as grateful as though the half-joking offer really deserved serious thanks. "Thank you, but I shall not mind the walk. A long walk is by no means a bad thing in this cold weather—though I was sorry to see," he added, "for the sake of the roads, as I came along, that it has begun to thaw."

From Mr. Beresford's entrance until this moment, nothing could have been more careless and languid than Helen's whole tone and manner ; but at this announcement of his a marvellous change came over her.

" Begun to thaw !" she exclaimed with the liveliest excitement. " Oh no, it has not ! oh, surely it is not thawing to-day !" and, starting forwards on her chair, she looked anxiously through the window.

There were undoubtedly signs of a commencing thaw, though they were as yet rather audible in the slow dripping of water from some upper ledges upon the garden walks, than visible in any moistening of the dried earth.

" I thought you were tired of the cold weather, Helen," Mr. Beresford said, in very evident surprise.

" Well, so I am !" she answered impatiently ; " but I am sure it never makes it a bit warmer when it begins to thaw ; and it is excessively annoying that the thaw should commence to-day, for the Wetheralls have got a chair for driving on the ice—Captain Carlyon brought it with him from

London yesterday—and we are all to try it this morning on the miller's pond.”

“My dear Helen, I am very sorry to disappoint you,” Mr. Beresford said hastily; “but I assure you that any sledging on the miller's pond to day will be utterly out of the question. It was quite unsafe even yesterday: I was there myself.”

“Why, Edward, the ice was four inches thick yesterday: Henry Wetherall told me so!”

“I know it was, Helen, but it was quite rotten from the falls of snow upon it. Helen, dear, give up the thought of this skating party: I don't think any of them would be so rash as to attempt it to-day; but, even if they should, promise me at least that *you* will not go with them.” His face was all eager with anxiety at the thought of the shadow of a possible danger coming near her; but she paid little regard to his entreaty.

“I shall certainly promise nothing of the sort,” she said quickly. “If the others think it safe to go, you may be sure I shall not pretend to be wiser than they are. Why, what a fool you would have them think me!”

"But, Helen, I was at the pond yesterday, and saw the state of the ice with my own eyes."

"Well, Edward, it is no use arguing about it," she said petulantly. "I am not going to set off and drive about upon the ice by myself—you know that very well; but, if the others come to fetch me, I shall go with them—so, if you please, don't say any thing more about it."

She leaned back in her chair with a cloud upon her pretty face; he too drew back a little, resting his elbow on the chimney-piece, and did not speak for a few moments; but, as I guessed, he was too really anxious to let the subject drop yet. He bent towards her again, and commenced hesitatingly and humbly—

"Helen, if you knew the satisfaction it would give me to hear you promise what I ask. These young men, as you know, are very thoughtless and reckless, and——"

The cloud upon her brow grew stormier; before he could proceed further, she looked up and interrupted him—

"I know nothing of the sort! I know I never

heard any human being call Henry Wetherall reckless, and as for the others—for Captain Carlyon, for instance—I suppose you will acknowledge that *he* is as likely to know as much as you do about whether the ice is safe or not. Such nonsense, to expect that I am going to be coaxed into giving up whatever I care for, simply to please people who choose to take absurd fancies into their heads about them!”

“God knows, Helen, if I would ask you to give up any thing that gave you pleasure simply to please *me!*” he said, with an earnest sadness and tenderness that might have moved her. “I ventured to think that, if you really understood how anxious I was about this matter, you would do what I asked; but if you will not”—he paused a moment and looked at her, but she only played impatiently with the tassels of her apron—“if you will not, at least I cannot go away and leave you.”

Still no reply, but a wilful, determined frown settling upon the brow.

“Helen,” he bent lower, and spoke still more anxiously. “Helen, are you offended?”

I had been growing for some time past more and more uneasy at my position. The matter began now to take so much the form of a lovers' quarrel, that I could not persuade myself to remain a listener any longer. I could reach the door without drawing any nearer towards them; so seizing the opportunity, when he was stooping very much over her chair, I rose up and made my exit as noiselessly as I could, intending, if I saw nothing of Mrs. Wynter, to retreat to my own room until I might be sent for. But, as I was midway upon the stairs, I met her coming down. "She was just coming to me," she said; so we ascended the remainder of the stairs in company, and she led me to a small room opening from the gallery, where I found Effie and a bright fire. We talked together for a few moments; then she went away and left me with my pupil.

CHAPTER IV.

SYMPTOMATIC.

I DO not know in what manner Helen's interview with her lover ended (interviews of that description, I soon discovered, were too common to render their separate terminations a matter of importance to any one save Mr. Beresford); but when, at one o'clock, Effie and I were invited to descend to luncheon, we found no one but Mrs. Wynter awaiting us in the dining-room.

"Helen has gone out riding," she said, "with some of her friends from Clifton. There was to have been some skating, but unfortunately you see it has begun to thaw. It was quite a disappointment to them all to have to give it up."

"Is Mr. Beresford with Miss Wynter?" I asked.

"Oh no! he had a visit to make quite at the other end of the parish; it is a great long straggling parish this of ours, and he went away soon after you went up-stairs, I think."

Helen did not return until evening. She was expected to dinner, and we waited for her half an hour; but, as she did not make her appearance at the end of that time, we dined without her.

"I do not know what Nelly is doing with herself, but I think our dinner is none the better for having waited for her," Mr. Wynter quietly remarked as he ate his fish.

But it was very evident to me that Helen's escapades, whatever inconveniences they might entail upon the rest of the family, were accustomed to be looked upon very leniently both by father and mother.

I liked the good-humour with which Mr. Wynter took the overdressing of his dinner, and was moved by it to exert myself more than I might otherwise have done to fill up the void that Helen's absence occasioned. Effie was very quiet, and Mrs. Wynter did not talk much; the burden of the

conversation, therefore, rested principally with Mr. Wynter and myself. We managed to maintain it tolerably. I was country bred, and had some very smattering knowledge about crops and land, enough to enable me to ask sufficiently intelligent questions; so I raked all my little amount of information together, and trafficked with it with what tact I could. It was a proceeding which, at its commencement, occasioned some little amazement and even contempt in Mr. Wynter's mind, and my questions were received, I thought, with a very evident suspicion that I was going to talk of what I did not understand; but as I went on, undismayed by this distrust, and was careful rather to appear more than less ignorant than I really was, my perseverance in a little while brought its reward, and before the cloth was removed I found that Mr. Wynter was waxing almost eloquent.

In nine cases out of ten, I would rather be a listener than a talker. I have no aptitude for talking to strangers; the utterance of vapid common-places to persons of whose lives and thoughts and

feelings I am in dense and utter ignorance, is to me an unspeakable weariness; and to do other than this—to walk with my heart unmasked in the face of all the world, to throw down my pearls, such as they are, on the *chance* that they may not be trodden down by swine—this is not possible for me.

But I like to draw on people to talk to me about themselves and their doings; for few subjects have, I believe, to the mass of mankind in reality so deep an interest, and assuredly, consciously or unconsciously, they discover more of their real nature and feelings in discoursing upon that selfish topic, than upon most others that could be offered to them. I think it is generally *not* consciously; the revelations that they make come mostly in chance words dropped here and there, in tones or gestures, in varying expressions of joy or sorrow, love or hatred; the varnished details they deal out to us are often something quite apart from these; but it is from these, and not from their lip eloquence, that we piece out the truth.

It is a woman's way of getting at it, but we get at a good deal so, and keep it in our minds very

quietly sometimes ; for, depend upon it, let men say what they choose, when a woman has the will she can close her lips as firmly as ever a man can.

I liked much that I found in Mr. Wynter. Beneath an unpolished manner there was great good sense, and even some sparklings of keen sagacity. He was evidently little accustomed to talk to women, but I liked him none the less for his bluntness. His occasional condescensions to my feminine ignorance, and then again his apparent forgetfulness, in the midst of some earnest harangue, that his listener was nothing but a woman, until I, not quite willing to sink my individuality, would recall myself to his mind by some question that a man would never ask, amused me greatly. Upon the whole, we did not make way ill together.

We had a quiet evening with reading, and work, and music. It was not till nine o'clock that Helen returned. She came straight into the dining-room as she had arrived, in her riding-habit, looking very handsome. The dress suited her to perfection, the closely fitting habit showing her figure to great advantage, and the broad riding-hat with its

plume of sable feathers making her fair skin, by the contrast of its darkness, still more brilliantly fair and clear. Her colour was raised, too, and the whole face beamed with smiles and good temper. It was an expression somewhat different from the last that I had seen upon it.

“Oh, Nelly, did you ride home?” Mrs. Wynter exclaimed. “I was going to send the carriage presently; for we thought, as you had not come to dinner, that you meant to stay out the evening. Did you really ride in this cold night?”

“It is not cold, mamma—it is the most delicious night—you really would not believe it!” Helen exclaimed.

I certainly did *not* believe it; but the remark was not addressed to me, and Mrs. Wynter was happily less sceptical.

“Is it really, dear? Well, I only hope you have not got cold. And did Henry Wetherall come with you?”

“Yes, Henry came”—and then with a momentary demur the sentence broke off—*not* as if it had reached its conclusion.

"And a servant, I suppose?" Mrs. Wynter said.

The colour rose for an instant on Helen's cheek.

"No, there was no servant. Captain Carlyon came along with Henry," she said, with feigned carelessness.

"I thought I heard more than one horse riding back," Mrs. Wynter quietly remarked, as she rose up and poked the fire into a blaze.

Helen was in the highest spirits all the remainder of that evening. There was not a trace of the morning's sullen obstinacy remaining in her. Wayward, and capricious, and wilful, she showed herself at every moment; but all she did or said was glossed over by a perfect sunshine of good-humour. To me she was extremely affable, and even cordial; nay, had I encouraged it, before we retired to our rooms, she would even have commenced to constitute me her confidante; but I succeeded fortunately in giving her such hints of the stony nature of my sympathy, as sufficed for the present at least to check that inclination in her; and I found that our mutual friendliness was not much affected by

the repulse. She only laughed, and cried that she would as soon strike herself against a stone wall as hold any intercourse with me ; and when, on going up-stairs to bed, I made a slight motion to escape from the arm which she showed an intention of putting round my waist, she rewarded me with a smart tap on my shoulder, which, as it had the effect of pushing me nearly upon the wainscoting, severed us effectually. Nevertheless, when we reached her room she insisted upon kissing me ; and, as the girl's good-nature had really a little moved me, I submitted to this ceremony with a good grace, and we parted amicably.

It was on the next morning that, when Effie and I came down-stairs for luncheon, we found some strangers in the dining-room. They were introduced to me as Mr. Wetherall and Captain Carlyon. The first was a young man of about two or three and twenty, slight, delicate, and intelligent-looking : the other was a year or two older, tall and handsome, with the distinguished bearing and gentlemanly manner of a soldier. Both were prepossessing in appearance, though

the personal advantages of the two could not with justice be for a moment compared together.

It struck me, during the conversation that succeeded my entrance, that there was something unusual and almost constrained in Helen's tone and manner. It was easy to perceive, by her heightened colour and sparkling eyes, that she was excited by this visit, and that the excitement was of a pleasurable description ; but, unless I erred greatly, she was at the same time by no means free from embarrassment.

By numerous indications I was involuntarily impressed with the feeling that she was adopting a reserve of manner towards Captain Carlyon in the presence of her father and mother, such as she had not shown him in their previous meetings.

"We *must* try the sledge to-morrow," Mr. Wetherall had said ; "the frost is setting hard in again."

It was accordingly settled that, should no second untimely thaw occur, Helen Wynter and the ladies of Clifton should make their first experiment in sledging on the following morning.

"And suppose that you all come in and take dinner with us on your way home?" Mr. Wynter said.

But Mrs. Wynter smiled doubtfully, and Helen laughed outright, and even Mr. Wetherall and Captain Carlyon seemed to be impressed with the impossibility of dining in skating costume ; so with one consent Mr. Wynter's hospitable proposal fell to the ground.

"Will you come next day, then?" he asked. "Mrs. Wynter, shall Harry take a message to his father, and ask them all to dine here on Saturday?"

"I hope Captain Carlyon will excuse such an informal invitation," Mrs. Wynter said, turning to him when this second plan was settled.

"I am only too happy that you are so kind as to dispense with formality," he answered eagerly ; and, with a genuine smile of pleasure on his face, his eyes glanced for an instant, I almost thought involuntarily, towards Helen.

She did not meet his look, but that she was aware of it her conscious face told me plainly, and

that each read, and read rightly, what was in the other's mind I never doubted, then or afterwards.

"Effie, I think we will go up again to our books," I said, and I took the child's hand and went away quietly. I believe the visitors did not stay very much longer. I presently heard the tread of horses on the carriage-drive; but I did not look from the window to see who the riders were. When our lessons were over, Effie and I put on our bonnets and went out till sunset; I had only time, after we returned, to arrange my dress before we were summoned to dinner.

CHAPTER V.

HELEN'S LOVERS.

ALTHOUGH our company on Saturday, besides the party from Clifton, consisted only of Mr. Beresford and a neighbouring landowner, a Mr. Wilson, we yet mustered as many as fifteen in the dining-room.

The skating party of the day before had gone off with brilliant success. Helen had come home in wild spirits—flushed, excited, and beautiful; and when, on this next evening, she and Captain Carlyon met again at Riverston, it was impossible not to perceive that he was more than ever *eprisé*. Mr. Beresford had not arrived at the time Captain Carlyon made his entrance, and I was weak enough to rejoice that he had not witnessed their meeting. When he did make his appearance they were at some dis-

tance from one another ; and Helen's reception of her lover—though a blush, which I fear bore a different interpretation to him from that it did to me, rose to her cheek as he addressed her—was neither cold nor ungentle.

Captain Carlyon led her in to dinner. At the first word of the announcement that it was served, he went to her and offered her his arm in a manner whose mingled *empressement* and familiarity could not be mistaken. That they were not unnoticed by Mr. Beresford I had good opportunity for observing ; for he was standing by my side at the moment, and I watched both the direction and the expression of his eye. His look, however, was rather one of smothered pain than either of alarm or surprise, as though—so I guessed—the sight of Helen's flirtations was an entertainment to which he was by no means a stranger. Still, that he was far from feeling easy beneath such exhibitions, was evident to me when we entered the dining-room—he gave me his arm thither—for no sooner did he perceive where Helen was seated than he pressed towards the opposite side of the table, and had I not inter-

ferred he would quickly have established both himself and me in an eligible position for observing her proceedings. But the anticipation of mounting such a guard over her by no means engaged my fancy, so I stopped the proceeding by resolutely standing still, and saying firmly—

“I don’t like sitting with my back to the fire. If you have no objection, I think we shall both find it pleasanter upon this side.”

“Oh, I beg your pardon,” he muttered, and in a moment more I had the satisfaction of finding both him and myself seated on the same side as Helen, with a substantial barrier in the persons of Mr. Wilson and Miss Wetherall between us and her.

However, as I had disappointed him of his intended entertainment, and as I had little doubt that he was secretly chafing—though I took the consciousness of *that* mildly enough—I was willing to make him what reparation was left in my power, believing indeed, without much hesitation, that I upon this side was able to give him at least as good amusement as he was likely to have got opposite: therefore, as soon as the conversation had fairly

commenced around us, partly for his gratification, and partly to satisfy myself, I introduced Helen's name into something that I was saying, and, as I expected, the bait took so well, that before five minutes had gone past I was well assured, by his eager tones and kindling eye, that for the present at least his momentary uneasiness was forgotten.

Upon the whole, the pain of this dinner was for me rather than for Mr. Beresford. I could not hear all that he said of Helen without feeling sincere pain for him : I could not see with what earnest and absorbed devotion he loved her—devotion so intense and blind, that through it he scarcely seemed to perceive her faults, or, in his humility, to recognise how poor and meagre *her* affection was, without the deepest pity for him. But from this day I never wondered that Helen did not care more for him. His love for her was of a kind for which, even in the midst of my pity, I had no deep sympathy. It was for a man too humble, too forbearing, too anxious ; in a word, too cowardly. I think that even to Helen, vain as she was, and dearly as she loved admiration and homage, it must in the

long run have been a wearying insipid thing to know, that there was no limit to her power over this man—nothing that he would not do for her—nothing that he would not suffer from her : I believe firmly, that had he shown her less than one half of the devotion that he did—had he made it his part to claim from her, instead of to repudiate, consideration for himself—had he even once set himself to bend her wilful spirit into subjection to him, I believe that her affection for him would as certainly have doubled itself as would her honour and respect. But he threw himself as a worm beneath her feet, and she was too little generous not to trample on him.

As I said, the pain of this dinner was more for me than for Mr. Beresford : I was glad when it was over and we were all returned to the drawing-room, though there was little there—strangers to me as all the ladies from Clifton were—that was likely to prove very entertaining to me ; but it was not much my mood to break my heart, though I might be forced to sit with my lips closed ; so I brought out a bit of flimsy silken work that I kept

for show occasions, and set myself very contentedly to operate thereon, not much disturbed by any thing that went on around me—for, beset by such a bevy of fair dames, Effie was for the time almost totally removed from my jurisdiction—until, after the lapse of half an hour or so, Helen came tripping up to me, and bending low over my chair—to judge by her gay spirits, *she* had not lacked good entertainment this evening—she addressed me in a half whisper—

“Miss Haig, without disturbing your meditations very greatly, may I presume to ask what you think of my *beau fiancé*?”

The tone was flippant, and almost, as I thought, derisive; there was a strange mixture and contradiction of expressions, too, in the smile which accompanied her words, that I liked little enough. I was not inclined to give her a serious answer, so I said shortly—

“I was not aware that you had one: I thought you were going to marry Mr. Beresford.”

“Well!” she exclaimed, with her blue eyes opening upon me, but I went on silently with my

sewing ; so, when she had waited until half-a-dozen more stitches were performed, she broke out again impatiently—

“What do you mean by saying that you *thought* I was going to marry Mr. Beresford?”

“What do you mean by styling a man so plain as Mr. Beresford your ‘*beau fiancé*?’” I retorted.

“Oh ! it is *that* that you are quarrelling with me about, is it ?” she exclaimed, with a momentary careless laugh. “But suppose I think him *beau* ?”

“Then you would call him so in a different tone.”

“Well, well, you snappish creature, let his beauty alone !” she cried, with a half-laughing petulance. “Can’t you have the politeness to tell me something more agreeable about him than that he is hideous ? Is he not good ? Does he not talk sensibly ?”

“Ay—as sensibly as if he had come out of Bedlam,” I said.

She stared at me for a moment, then, suddenly

understanding me, clapped her hands and broke out laughing.

"Oh, poor Edward ! And what did you say to him ? Did you tell him he was a fool ?" she exclaimed.

"Not I ;" I said. "I don't give myself trouble to give useless information."

"And his eloquence has produced no effect ?"

"Not the slightest."

"Not altered one bit of your opinion ?"

"Not one iota."

"And you still think he is too good for me—in spite of all his folly ?"

"I think his folly is the one thing of all others that you are least worthy of," I said, more sharply than jokingly ; and, thinking there had been enough of it, I rose up and turned away.

She broke into a short unmusical laugh, that was less gay in reality, I thought, than it feigned to be ; and, wheeling round, she caught Miss Wetherall by the shoulders as she stood within a pace of her, and exclaimed in tones of mock suffering—

"Oh, Cary! do you see a wound any where? Miss Haig has been sticking her quills into me. There—don't go near her! For all she looks so bewitching, she is the veriest porcupine that ever entered a house. I shall warn every body against her. Miss Haig, do you hear what I am saying? I am going to tell every body——" she broke off abruptly, "unless," and she stood musingly looking at me—"After all, I am more than half afraid to make an enemy of you, you prickly thing. What do you say to making it up again? Are you spiteful?"

"Not a bit."

"You would not scratch me if I put my hand out?"

"I will draw my glove on, if you like."

"No—I think I will trust you. There, then!"—and she put her hand out cautiously.

For a moment, as her fingers closed over mine and our eyes met, the gay, indifferent, insincere expression of her face gave place to a softer and more earnest look. She hesitated for an instant, and then bent over me, and whispered half laughing—

"I am going to be good—I am indeed, Miss Haig, some day!"

"Why not begin at once?" I asked.

"Ah, but it is difficult!" she exclaimed—"and I hardly know how to do it. I don't know good from bad sometimes, and at some other times"—she paused a moment, and suddenly her eyes swam with tears; "at some other times I think that perhaps every thing is pre-ordained, and that—that I must just go on as the stream leads me, for it is no use fighting against what is to be," and she looked up again with a half laugh.

"Exactly; we are all so many little boats set on a great sea to drift before the wind!" I said with some irony, for I had little sympathy with sentimental notions about predestination, even where they were held seriously, and none whatever for such a momentary profession of holding them as I took Helen's confession to be; but I was happily spared the trouble of any further discussion of the matter, for I had scarcely spoken when the door of communication with the dining-room opened, and our feminine party was next

moment dissolved by the entrance of Captain Carlyon.

He was at Helen's side before a minute had gone past, and she turned to him all beautiful with her heightened colour and beaming eyes—she had little thought of predestination then, I fancy; or, if it did still haunt her mind, I imagine it appeared to her to be by no means a thing to make the tears come into her eyes; undoubtedly, at any rate, she addressed herself to her fate with most lamb-like resignation.

"Captain Carlyon, do you see any marks of a combat?" she began. "I have been engaged in a duel, and have come off desperately wounded—I have not got a weapon left!"—and she held out her empty hands, and looked up to him ruefully.

"Shall I try to win them back?" he asked gaily. "Who has been your adversary?"

"No, no—she has poisoned shafts!" Helen exclaimed: "she is all quills, and thorns, and sharp edges; you could not touch her but she would run a prick into you. No, no! I won't have the battle begun again," and she gravely shook her head and

looked very serious, until, glancing up at him, her solemnity abruptly broke down into a little peal of laughter, for a comical expression of perplexity was resting on his face.

"You don't know what I am talking about!" she exclaimed gaily. "Ah! well, I am not going to enlighten you; so don't ask any questions. We have proclaimed a treaty of peace."

"Oh! you should have told me that at first," he said. "If peace has been agreed to, you know, I must not offer to be your champion."

"Ah, very true!" she returned carelessly; "only you know such strict military honour does not hold amongst women—though indeed," she added laughing, "I am afraid I must not venture to say that either, seeing that the truce was made here with Honor itself."

"And Honor itself means to keep you to it," I said—"for this night at least; so you had better begin to talk of something else before the temptation to break it gets stronger."

To what extent Captain Carlyon was enlightened by our conversation, I am not in a position to de-

clare ; to judge by the expression upon his face, it left him hopelessly in the dark ; and the confused smile with which he politely tried to cover his perplexity, served only, I thought, to throw an expression of silliness into his face, such as nature had not intended it to wear. It was a handsome, open, sensible face at ordinary times—not without a dash of dandyism in it ; but yet, in spite of that, honest, and brave, and strong. I liked it : he might have a touch too much of vanity about him, but he was a frank, fine-looking English soldier for all that.

Helen took my advice, and set herself to talk upon a new subject. There was a gaily bound book, filled with engravings of Shakespeare's heroines, on a table, close to which she seated herself ; its bright binding caught her eye, and, reaching towards it, she merrily called to Captain Carlyon to come and let her hear his taste in beauty, and they were soon busy enough over the volume.

Their critiques amused me not a little. To what extent they were either of them perfectly sincere, I was doubtful : I soon perceived that it

was Helen's coquettish pleasure to feign the strongest admiration for all such faces as, in complexion or cast of features, most decidedly differed from her own ; while Captain Carlyon's gallantry consisted in an entirely opposite choice—in a laudation of fair beauties over dark—of sunny eyes and dimpled cheeks over drooping lids and smileless lips.

The examination of this book turned out to be a happy thought of Helen's ; for before she and Captain Carlyon had been many minutes engaged over it, the dining-room emptied a second detachment of its tenants upon us, two of whom, Mr. Beresford and Mr. Henry Wetherall, making their way very quickly to where Helen sat, without delay installed themselves into the post of additional critics, and the war of tastes went on with renewed activity and eagerness ; while Helen sat in the midst of her little group of admirers, the centre of a mimic court, in which she played her part of mimic queen to the life.

But to me it was somewhat of a singular exhibition ; and as I sat in my quiet place, I looked

upon the forced smiles on Mr. Beresford's lips, and on the ill-hidden anxiety that clouded both brow and eyes, with a wonder that even in its pity was not altogether free from contempt.

I grew tired at last of watching and listening. I grew tired of seeing Shakespeare's noble women dragged up one by one to meet the shallow praise or shallower condemnation of this petty conclave ; I patiently listened while, in quick succession, Rosalinds and Celas, Imogens and Portias, Hermiones and Cordelias, were brought up for judgment ; but when at last they took upon them scornfully to fling aside a regal Cleopatra, I began to feel that I had had enough of it. So I gathered up my work, and went in search of another seat.

The party broke up early, and all took their departure together. I had expected that Mr. Beresford would tarry behind the rest, and, unless I mistake, he would have done so willingly ; but it was found, when the others rose to go, that a heavy storm of rain had commenced, and a mile's drenching walk was scarcely to be desired even by a lover ; he was wise enough, therefore, to accept the

offer Mr. Wilson made him, of a seat in his carriage.

He went away in no very joyous spirits. I watched him as he went up to Helen, waiting a few moments with a touching silent patience, until some gay farewells with which she was engaged were ended; then so eagerly seeking to catch her eye, his own expression the while most sadly supplicative; holding her hand when he had once secured it with a lingering pressure; trying with wistful earnestness to gain a gentle look or a kind word from her; and repaying the light careless sally, which instead of these she gave to him, with a smile that so sorrowfully strove to be grateful. I watched all this, and, as I looked, a boding of evil crept coldly over me. The sound of Helen's still laughing voice in the emptied rooms irritated me. When the doors were closed, and the carriage wheels had died away, I made my brief good-nights, and went up-stairs to my own room, glad to shut out the sound of her merriment for the remainder of that night.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. BERESFORD KEEPS SILENCE.

I do not know whether the excessive intimacy which there appeared to be between Helen Wynter and the Wetheralls was or was not a thing of new growth ; but certainly during the succeeding weeks Helen more than half lived at Clifton. Morning, noon, and night found her there. She honoured us pretty generally with her company at breakfast ; but, breakfast over, it was rarely that we saw much more of her till night set in : day after day there were skating parties, or riding parties, or excursions, when the sun shone, to this or that place of local note—to a ruin, or a bridge, a hill, or a waterfall ; and day after day she would come home too late for dinner, or more often would not come at all ; and night rides with a gallant escort, a *part* at

least of whose composition I never found it difficult to guess at, grew more and more common as the moon, which had been young when I first came to Riverston, rose nightly higher and fuller.

“Helen is a great favourite with them all,” gentle Mrs. Wynter would say half deprecatingly to me, more than once, feeling instinctively perhaps—though *I* gave small expression to my sentiments—that Helen stood in need of some excuse. “And you know, if she is a little too fond of gaiety now, she will sober down when she is married, like the rest of us. I was almost as merry as she is once myself;” and she would look up to me with her half-anxious smile, seeming, I always thought, as though she were searching wistfully in my face for a confirmation, which I am afraid she never found.

Only once did I ever attempt to warn her as to what Helen was doing. It was on a day when, after lessons, Effie and I, walking in the Riverston grounds, came suddenly at the turning of a path face to face with Helen and Captain Carlyon. They were alone, and it hardly needed the sight of Helen’s heightened colour and involuntary start

to assure me how unwelcome our encounter was to her. But, confused though she was for an instant, she rallied her spirits immediately.

"Ah, Miss Haig, we shall get some information from *you*, perhaps ! In the course of your peregrinations have you seen any trace of mamma ? Captain Carlyon and I are wandering about like two stray sheep in search of her."

"Did you think you should find her *here* ?" I asked.

The retreating colour came back to Helen's cheek : she knew well enough what I meant : she knew how little her slow saunter along this unfrequented, mossgrown path looked like a search. She turned my question off with a short, half embarrassed laugh.

"Oh ! I don't know—she is in the grounds somewhere. We all came out together, and we must have missed her and the others at some turning."

"Very probably," I said drily ; and, as the case did not seem one to require consolation, I thought it was needless to prolong the interview ; so I took

Effie's hand, and we went on with our walk, and met with no further molestation.

But in the evening, when Effie had gone to bed, and, Helen being away at Clifton, Mrs. Wynter and I sat together alone, I put a question to her that I had been meditating for some time. I asked her whether she knew if Captain Carlyon was aware of Helen's engagement to Mr. Beresford.

She flung a startled, uneasy look upon me as I spoke, and began to answer with hurried hesitation—

“Oh yes! at least, you know, *I* have never spoken of it; but no doubt he knows. The Wetheralls would tell him, I am sure. My dear, what makes you ask?”

“Because I think Captain Carlyon is allowing himself to become attached to her,” I said; “and because, if *she* sees this too, it is neither wise nor right of her to throw herself in his way to the extent that she does—unless——”

I hesitated for a moment, half inclined to let my sentence remain unfinished, but she urged me

on with a quick questioning "Yes?" and I concluded abruptly—"unless she may really intend to marry him."

"To marry *him*!—to marry Captain Carlyon!" Mrs. Winter exclaimed with nervous eagerness. "Oh, my dear, she has no thought of such a thing. It is just her way; I know it is very wrong, and she should not do it; but she is so fond of admiration, that you see it carries her away a little sometimes, and she does not think of what she is doing. But, indeed, you must not fancy that there is any thing wrong between her and Edward. She does not like to be found fault with, and she gets a little hasty sometimes with him, I know, but that is it all: you would not believe, perhaps, how much attached to him she really is—and he, poor fellow! why, Helen is the one thought of his life. Oh no, my dear, I am sure the thought of marrying Captain Carlyon has never entered her mind for a moment."

"Yet might it not be well," I suggested, "both out of consideration for him—as he may not have kept his thoughts in such good order as Miss

Wynter—and also for Mr. Beresford, that she should be a little less at Clifton?”

She looked up at me with her face of timid perplexity.

“How could I manage it? The Wetheralls would think it so strange; because, you know, what reason could I give them? And, Helen herself—how could I get her to agree to it? She would not—I am quite sure she would not! Oh, my dear, I think it would do no good to try it. I don’t think any harm will come—it will be best to let matters go their own course.”

And assuredly matters *did* go their own course, with little further hindrance from any one, except, perhaps, a feeble expostulation or supplication now and then from Mr. Beresford, which, like many more good deeds and good intentions, was certainly left to reap, as it best could, its own reward. As much as it was possible, Helen, I perceived, avoided him. She feigned to be ignorant of the times when he was coming: she more than once left the house when he was in it: she tried even to conciliate *me*, that, by keeping me in the room

with her during his visit, she might escape the *tête-à-têtes* that it was clear to me she shrank from. As week after week passed on, I grew more and more certain that she felt his presence as a constant pain. She could not command her spirits before him : uneasy, restless—her gaiety was forced and unnatural ; her sunny temper became uncertain and sullen ; if she tried passively to submit to his expressions of affection, she quickly grew feverishly irritable ; if she began by showing her impatience, the scene sometimes closed in a fit of remorse—once even in a passionate outbreak of tears. They were both miserably unhappy whenever they met, and yet Helen would listen to no entreaties for explanation ; there was nothing, she persisted, to be explained—she could not help what Mr. Beresford chose to fancy. And she would leave him with her lip trembling nervously, and a dark shadow in her eyes, to reappear perhaps in half an hour in another scene, as gaily decked in sunny smiles as though no tear had ever dimmed her eye, or no cloud ever darkened on her heart.

But to Mr. Beresford there came no April changes like these. Day by day the shadow upon *his* face slowly but surely deepened: I could trace the growing of the lines upon it—the darkening of the eye—the thinning of the cheek—the settling into it of the weary look of constant pain. He made few complaints, I believe, even to Helen—none to any one beside her: he was weak, and he suffered with the inactive despondency of weakness: her love was like his heart's blood to him, and yet he seemed unable, even when every hour cried to him that he was losing it, to rouse himself to one vigorous effort: a feeble clinging to the hope that her affection would return when she was left alone with him again was the whole support he rested on; for even he, like Mrs. Wynter, through all and in spite of all, persisted in believing that if Captain Carlyon was away all would be well—blinding themselves to the fact, which to me was as clear as daylight, that Helen was not *flirting* with Captain Carlyon, but *in love* with him.

The party at Clifton had long broken up, but still Captain Carlyon stayed. Nearly six weeks

had elapsed since my arrival, when one morning Effie gleefully burst into the schoolroom, to announce to me that the coming Thursday would be Helen's twenty-first birthday, and that, in order to celebrate her coming of age, her mother had agreed to give a ball at Riverston.

CHAPTER VII.

COMING OF AGE.

I SHALL not soon forget the brilliancy of that Thursday evening.

Clear, frosty, and beautiful, the night closed in. It was starlight such as we only see in winter—starlight, that seems as if the stars had left the infinite distance of their spheres to lean down lovingly in their unveiled glory towards our world, making all heaven brilliant with their fires, and all earth beautiful beneath their light. There was a sprinkling of new-fallen snow hiding the ground, and lying cold and white on leafless trees, and delicately edging the dark green of laurel leaves; it lay upon them unstirred by any breath of wind, for the night was stiller than a summer evening—still as only winter death and winter

frost could make it. As I stood looking forth upon it from my window, a wild fancy came to me, that the wide grounds of Riverston looked like a corpse lying within a new-made shroud, with the canopy of stars burning a silent watch above it.

But if the night was still without, within the house there was no lack of life or motion. From roof to basement, Riverston was that evening one blaze of light—one unbroken arena for busy preparation and gleeful merriment. All day we had found no rest for the soles of our feet, in dining or breakfast or drawing room; Mr. Wynter had been imprisoned within the sanctum that was styled his study; I was condemned to wear out the long hours within the confines of the school-room, until, rebelling, I forced my way into unknown lower regions, and constituted myself one of the genii of the hour; as for Mrs. Wynter—for Helen—for Effie—throughout that day they bore an omnipresent life.

It was a day of chaos and confusion worse confounded, until, when disruption had reached its

climax, light at last broke upon our darkness ; the jarring elements grew harmonized, order worked itself out of disorder, and when at last the winter's night lighted its stars, Riverston too blazed out in all the glory of its fresh-decked splendour, glittering with waxen lights, and brilliant flowers, and gilded ornaments—a fairy scene of bright enchantment that has left a mark upon my memory.

We kept country hours ; by nine o'clock the rooms were nearly full, the music had begun to play, and all was active preparation for the night's enjoyment.

I knew few of those who were there, and I was content—perhaps more than content—to remain in my obscurity, less a participator than a spectator of the evening's festivities. But fortunately my example had few imitators. The dancing commenced solemnly, as English dancing always does ; but, the ice once broken by a couple of quadrilles, the right spirit began rapidly to assert itself, and before little more than an hour had passed the large drawing-room was as busy a

scene of joyous and brilliant gaiety as the greatest ball-lover might desire to see.

It was undoubtedly a merry evening ; and gayest amongst the gay, and fairest amongst the fair, was Helen Wynter. Even in my eyes—not blinded certainly by partiality—so beaming as she was with pleasure, so flushed with triumph, she bore away the palm from all others who were there. I had seen her very lovely and brilliant at moments before ; I have seen a higher beauty in her since ; but never before or after, by day or night, have I ever seen her wear the look again, that, even in the midst of all her wildest and most reckless folly, she never *that* evening except for a few passing moments ceased to wear.

It was late before we saw any thing of Mr. Beresford ; and when at last he came, the quiet figure, threading its slow way through the gay throng, attracted little attention from any one. Helen certainly did not even see him. Conspicuous in the midst of the dancers as he entered, she and Captain Carlyon—he in full military uni-

form—were figuring in a country dance : they, two, by their gay merriment and laughter, as they indefatigably exerted themselves to tire out every other couple engaged in the dance with them, drawing upon them the attention of one half of the whole company. It was not an inspiriting vision to greet Mr. Beresford's entrance.

“ You are a tardy guest,” I said to him, as he came, less by seeking than chance, towards me. “ Do you not know that Riverston flung her gates open two hours ago ? ”

“ I am afraid I am an uncongenial guest as well as a tardy one,” he answered, with one of the flickering smiles in which it was his distressing habit to indulge. “ We, who are no dancers, feel somewhat out of place in a scene like this.”

He was forced to turn his back upon the dancers while he spoke to me, for I was facing them, and there was no room for him by my side. As his position thus shielded him from the sight of Helen, I determined to detain him there until the dance was ended ; for I never could see any especial wisdom in preparing either man or woman for one

great wound by a preliminary process of general puncturing.

Helen and her partner had gained their sought for victory, and now, gaily talking and laughing, they began to promenade around the room. I gave Mr. Beresford his freedom, finding his attention hopelessly gone from me, and we both watched their progress in silence. She passed in her first round within a step of us—and went by and never saw him. The second circuit that they made they were talking less eagerly, and, before they had reached where Mr. Beresford stood, they both perceived him. Helen made a movement to turn aside, and, hurriedly calling up a smile, put out her hand—

“When did you come? We had almost given up expecting you,” she said.

“I have only been here a few minutes,” he answered,

“You were too much alarmed at the thought of such a Babel to come at a decent hour like other folk, I suppose?” she exclaimed laughing. “Well, if you don’t intend to dance, I *do* pity you.”

"And, if *you* intend to dance all night as you have begun, I pity you much more," I said half jestingly. "If you have any thing mortal about you, you must be longing to sit down."

"Yes, if I could find Miss Wynter a seat"—Captain Carlyon began, looking round as if with the intention of moving onwards.

"Miss Wynter may have *my* chair," I said, and I rose up and made Helen take it; "I am going away." And I withdrew to another part of the room, and left Helen with her two wooers: she was quite capable of managing them both.

It was nearing twelve o' clock, and Effie's eyes were growing heavy.

"I think we must send her away," Mrs. Wynter said to me: "we can't have her up at supper. My dear, would you kindly tell her that she must go?"

I went therefore to her with this sentence of banishment; but, despite of sleepy eyes, I found that she was not very eager to depart.

"There is nobody to go with me, Miss Haig. Eliza is busy in the kitchen: I know she is; so I *must* sit up."

"You *must* do nothing of the sort, Effie ! Come away with me, and we will see if I can't get you to bed as well as Eliza."

With a little murmuring, which the temptation of a new nurse somewhat mitigated, she prepared to come with me. But our passage to the door was slow enough, for they were in the middle of a waltz, and all who were not dancing were confined to so deplorably small a space around the walls, that movement through their close masses, or even upon the skirt of them, was not easy. As we laboriously crept along, more than once the united figures of Helen and Captain Carlyon swept past us with a sort of flashing brightness, her light feet, as his arm held her, scarcely more than touching the ground, her whole face brilliant, and even her voice, as its tones now and then reached us, all musical with happiness.

Just as we reached the door she drew back from the circle for a few moments' breathing, and suddenly perceived us.

"Oh, Effie ! you poor victim, are you going off ?" she exclaimed.

"Is Miss Effie so soon tired of dancing?" Captain Carlyon asked.

"No, I am not tired, but Miss Haig says I am to go," Effie replied rather ruefully.

"Miss Haig is a tyrant, and I would not mind her if I were you, Effie. I would never be ruled by a despot!" Helen exclaimed, with reckless merriment.

"Those who are not under despotic sway find defiance a very easy thing," I said laughing.

"Ah! you think if I was in Effie's place you would break my spirit?" she asked quickly.

"I would break *something* about you, or we would not stay long together."

She made no answer except to fling out a defiant, mocking laugh, and, turning away, in another moment she and Captain Carlyon were again in the midst of the whirl of waltzers.

"How often Nelly and Captain Carlyon dance together!" Effie innocently said, as she lingered to take a final gaze.

"Good dancers generally pair together," I answered, and Effie's curiosity was satisfied.

We accomplished our exit, and, betaking ourselves up-stairs to Effie's little room, I put my child to bed, and then watched by her pillow till she fell asleep—not a long vigil, for the tired eyes were ready enough to close. She was sleeping peaceably and soundly, with the dark lashes lying heavily on her still beautifully flushed cheek, when, as the hall clock was striking the second quarter after twelve, I softly stole from her room, and began to retrace my steps across the gallery.

A busy hum of many sounds rose on my ears as I passed onwards; voices and music, and the deadened footfalls of the dancers, all reached me in an entangled buzz and murmur through the closed doors; but nearer than these, and not mingling with them, one distinct sound came suddenly towards me—the echo of an imperious, hurried footstep on the stairs. It approached with hasty, irregular impatience: I had scarcely descended two or three steps when I came face to face with Helen Wynter.

But what had come over her? Her eyes shot out defiance, her cheek was dabbled with wet tears,

her lips were tremulous with anger, her whole face was flushed and disfigured by the thralldom of some great emotion. She swept by me, and would have passed without a word; but, as it happened, in her haste to proceed she entangled herself suddenly in my dress, and, stumbling upon it, was caught and forced against her will to pause a moment.

I did not speak, but left her—though I suffered by it—to disengage herself without my help: she only opened her lips as she stooped down to mutter something which *might* certainly have been an apology, though to my ears it seemed to savour more of the tone of an execration; then impatiently freeing herself she darted from me, without another word or look—and I was left to work out of this vision what theory I chose.

My dress was so torn, that without some patching of it I could scarcely reappear amongst the dancers. Helen, however, had a work-table in the breakfast-room, and concluding that that apartment would probably be vacant—for it had been used as the coffee-room in the early part of the

evening, and as far as I knew had been unoccupied since—I bent my steps thither.

But I was deceived in my expectations. The room appeared as silent as I could desire when I first opened the door ; but I had scarcely crossed the threshold when a head started suddenly erect from the table, and Mr. Beresford's face, pale even to ghastliness, confronted me.

He rose up, stammering some unintelligible apology. How it was that I did not at once retreat I hardly know : I was the intruder, and had no right, when I saw his condition, to force my company upon him ; but there was so much of the weakness of a woman in him, that I always felt instinctively that he was not fit, like other men, to bear and struggle with his griefs alone ; and it was probably this feeling now—for I neither reasoned the matter nor paused to consider—that made me, instead of retiring from the room, quietly advance to fulfil the intention with which I had entered it.

I brought a candle to the work-table, and, taking out needle and thread, prepared to commence my

mending—for the rent that Helen had made was only in an outer net skirt that I wore.

Mr. Beresford remained standing in the place whence he had risen on my entrance, one hand nervously leaning on the table, his eyes wandering restlessly, as though he was uncertain where to go, his face still wearing the same livid pallor, the same stricken look of anguish, as when it first was raised towards me.

I said to him abruptly—

“Miss Wynter tore my gown just now—look what a rent her foot has made.”

“Miss Wynter!—where did you see her?” he exclaimed, turning towards me with suddenly awakened eagerness.

“I met her on the stairs: she was going to her own room, I suppose,” I said.

He had come close to me; I raised my eyes towards him as I spoke, but my look was met by one of such passionate dumb inquiry that I shrank from it, knowing I had nothing to tell him that could give relief or comfort.

Almost a minute passed in silence: he did not

stir from my side, but I went on with my work and did not raise my head again, until at last, slowly and hesitatingly, he asked me—

“Did she say—I mean, did she stop to speak to you?”

“She stopped to get her foot out of my dress,” I said, “and she spoke—but what she said I could neither hear nor understand.”

“Good God! was she so agitated?” he cried, his own white face working with emotion.

“I do not think it was agitation, Mr. Beresford,” I replied bluntly; “what I saw in her was far more like impatience and anger.”

He gave a low groan of pain, and, turning from me, began to pace the room, his head stooping upon his breast, his chest heaving with deep-drawn breaths, that broke from him almost with the weight of sobs. I did not look at him: I bent my head before the wrestling of that agony, as I would have closed my ears, had I had the power to do it, to its stifled moans.

Our silence lasted for several minutes: it was broken at last by his sudden return to where I sat.

"Miss Haig," he burst forth, "you must bring Helen back! I want to see her again. I *must* see her before I go. You can make her come—will you go and look for her?"

He spoke in sharp, abrupt sentences; but his intense and agonized eagerness clothed the bald words with a glow of passion.

"Will you go and look for her?" he repeated.

"Not till I am more persuaded of the service it would be to you to bring her," I said. "Mr. Beresford, take my advice, and do not seek Helen again to-night: she is in no mood to make good come of it."

"But I only want her for one moment!" he pleaded with the same impassioned earnestness. "You do not understand: we parted angrily just now—she said something that she did not mean—I only want her to unsay this—one word would do it—one instant, if she would come."

"Then let her unsay it to-morrow," I said.

"To-morrow will not do!" he cried; "it must be to-night—to-night! Miss Haig, I tell you, I *cannot* wait until to-morrow!"

His eyes flashed with a wild fire, his colourless cheek was spotted with a stain of crimson ; there were full veins like tight-drawn cords upon his brow, and on the clenched hand that he struck upon the table by me.

I was little inclined to work him to a higher pitch of passion : I made no further attempt to reason with him, but, striving to add as little as possible to his excitement, I asked him coldly—

“What do you want me to do ? Will it be enough if I bring you a message from her ?”

He looked up to me with a hesitating suspicion, which, in spite of the wrong it did me, touched my heart with pity. I interrupted the words that were rising to his lips, that I might answer it before he spoke.

“You need not fear to trust me,” I said ; “I will bring no false message. You shall have what Helen says, be it what it may.”

“I believe you—thank you !” he said, eagerly. “But oh ! Miss Haig,” he cried passionately ; “if she will come to me, do not only cheat me with a message. Ask her first to come—tell her I ask

her, for the sake of all my love : and if you bring her," he abruptly added, "or if you but bring one word of kindness from her—God for ever bless you!"

He grasped both my hands in his, and wrung them together : I bore the pain silently, and, when his convulsive pressure loosened from them, without any further delay I set out on my strange errand.

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER SUPPER.

I RETRACED my way up-stairs ; musing upon this matter, I bent my steps towards Helen's room, but when I reached it, I found the door wide open, and no trace of her within. I sought her with equal success within the school-room ; then, concluding that she must have masked her emotion with greater expedition than I had thought was possible, I again descended, hoping to find her in the drawing-room. But the drawing-room was half emptied of its guests when I entered it ; one portion of the company I found had adjourned to supper, and amongst the number that remained Helen was not.

I addressed myself to one of the Misses Wetherall who happened to be seated near the door.

"I am looking for Miss Wynter ; can you tell me if she is in the dining-room ?"

"Helen ? oh, yes ! she went in just now with Captain Carlyon. I don't know where she was when *we* had supper, but she re-appeared a few minutes ago, and they went in together."

I returned to give this information to Mr. Beresford, for I could not pursue Helen to the supper table. I found him still, as I re-entered the room, continuing his perturbed walk to and fro, but it ceased as soon as he perceived me, and before I could speak he was facing me, and bursting into his eager, almost reproachful, exclamation—

"You have not brought her !"

"I have not even seen her," I said. "I came back to tell you that you must have patience for a little while, for it may be half an hour before I shall be able to speak to her."

"Will she not admit you ? Will she not open her door ?" he demanded hurriedly.

I would have spared him if I could, but he forced the truth from me.

"She is not in her room, Mr. Beresford; she has come down-stairs again."

He said nothing as I spoke, but the spasm of pain that flashed across his face was pitiful. There was a moment's silence: then he asked faintly—

"Is she dancing?"

"No," I said; "she is in the dining-room."

His eyes shot out one gleam of their weary sorrow upon me; then he turned from me without a word. I waited till his slow walk brought him back to where I stood; then I said to him firmly—

"Mr. Beresford, despair never helped man or woman in this world."

He looked up to my face with a wild start; he did not answer me for a moment, then he broke forth passionately—

"It never helped them—no! but when they are on the brink of losing their whole earth's treasure, *what* can they do but despair?"

"They can fight and conquer," I said, "as thousands are doing, and tens of thousands have done."

"Not in the first hour," he said rapidly—"not

when the blow is but *half* struck—when the hope is but *half* dead !”

“ Will *certainly* give you strength, then ? ” I asked.

There came no answer ; I saw that from such an examination his very soul shrank. As I spoke his lips parted in a convulsive shiver, his breath sank back ; he raised one look of deprecating anguish towards me—then turned away, with his head bowed down upon his hands.

“ *Canst thou drink of this cup ?* ” Solemn words came stealing over me ; solemn thoughts of *one* unutterable suffering, when earthly agony broke in sweat as drops of blood, and yet the prayer was, “ Not *my* will be done.” And this was a minister of God ! and with that cup of earth-renunciation barely on his lips, the cry that tore his soul was that he *could* not drink it ! But I held my peace : whatever his weakness was, assuredly *my* part was not to rebuke him.

I went away, and waited in the drawing-room for Helen’s coming. A dance was in progress, and those who were not engaged in it were gathered

round the room in groups: I took my seat in a vacant and half-hidden corner, and was grateful for the solitude in which I was left.

The time passed slowly enough, but at length the door of communication opened, and, as the brilliant troop flocked in, their merry buzz of entrance for a moment half drowned our music. And there, in the midst of them, was Helen Wynter, without a trace remaining in her of her stormy anger—without the crease of one frown on her white brow—without one trace upon her laughing lips of the sullen pride that had so lately swollen and distorted them. God have pity on that other's weakness!—for I knew, as I looked at her, that the blow was not *half*, but *wholly* and without hope, fallen.

My errand was nevertheless still to be done, so I began to wind my way through the throng towards where she stood; but before I was half way towards her she was abruptly carried off by Henry Wetherall, to join a set of quadrilles that was forming. I was vexed at my ill fortune—but doubly so when, again at the end of the dance,

I missed her; for I had taken up my position by the door, meaning to arrest her as she promenaded round the room, and it so chanced that she never once crossed the spot where I stood; for the music striking up again as she stood amongst a little group of talkers, Captain Carlyon came quickly up to her, and claimed her hand, and before an interposition was possible she was whirling with him round the room.

I was beginning to lose patience, and, without waiting for the termination of this second dance, I began to endeavour, as she flew past me, to attract her attention. And in this I indeed found it not difficult to succeed; but unfortunately, when accomplished, it brought me very little nearer to my end, for to all my signs she only laughingly shook her head, protesting in dumb motion that she could not come to me. Still I chose to persevere, and I beckoned to her, till at last, tired out by my pertinacity, she allowed herself to be beaten from her opposition.

She fell back from the circle, and leaving Captain Carlyon with a shrug of the shoulders, to

which he seemed to make a sympathetic response, she came towards me, following after me as I retreated further into the empty hall.

"Well, witch!" she exclaimed, "what are you weaving your spells about now? Can't you take a human way of calling me, instead of beckoning at me in that ghostly fashion, until you begin to make my blood curdle?"

"I am forced to take the only fashion I can lay hold of," I said. "I have been waiting to speak to you till I am thoroughly tired; come back here, I have a message for you."

"A message, have you? Well, who sends it?" she asked.

She spoke with an affectation of perfect carelessness; but, as she glanced up, a half-uneasy suspicion dawned in her eyes, belying the coolness of her tone.

"Mr. Beresford," I said.

Her whole manner changed in an instant. There was no more affectation of indifference; she flung up her head, and her eyes flashed out a sudden blaze of pride.

"And may I ask how Mr. Beresford comes to make *you* his messenger?" she demanded with the coldest haughtiness.

"Simply because I chanced to come in his way," I said quietly. "You had better let that matter alone, and attend to the message that I have brought from him."

"I will attend to no message!" she cried impetuously. "I have heard ten times more from him already than I want to hear, and he has had my answer: he can want no more from me."

The lowering flush had risen to her brow; with a swift motion she tried to escape from me, but I was on the watch and caught her arm.

"Stand still: you are not going!" I said. "I promised Mr. Beresford to give you his message, and you shall stay until you have heard it. He wants you to return and speak to him—will you go?"

She burst into a bitter disdainful laugh.

"I look as if I wanted another scene with him, do I not?" she exclaimed mockingly, and she struggled to free herself from my grasp by a

sudden wrench, but my hand held her wrist firmly.

"*I don't want you to go,*" I said. "You would give him little consolation I think if you did."

"What *do* you want then?" she cried vehemently. "What are you keeping me here for?"

"Because I have something you can grant more easily to ask from you. Helen Wynter, listen to me for a few moments. You have said something to-night to Mr. Beresford that has half-maddened him: so far as I can understand, you have told him a bitter truth in most bitter and cruel words. Will you soften these? Will you send him some message through me, by which he may comfort himself with the thought that you have *some* compassion for the misery you have thrust upon him—that you are not altogether so heartless and hardened as you seem?"

I saw the anger that was flashing through her eyes; I felt, as I held her, how she writhed in her feverish and angry impatience.

"So this is what I get," she broke out, "for having been idiot enough to make myself wretched

for months past in trying to play the hypocrite before him ? It was because I was so hardened and heartless, was it, that day after day, and week after week, as *you* know well, I delayed and shrank back from saying this thing that he has *forced* me at last to say to him to-night ? It was because I had no compassion for his misery ? because I *liked* the feeling of going about the world as a liar ? Let me go, Miss Haig ! You shall *not* keep me here to listen to your insults ! ” and she struggled with me again.

“ I have little desire to insult you,” I said. “ I am not meddling with the past ; it is for what you have done and are doing to-night that I call you heartless.”

“ For what I have done to-night ! For my having broken loose from the falsehood I was acting—is *that* what you mean ? ” she exclaimed.

“ Helen Wynter, don’t act a falsehood, *now* ! ” I said, impatiently.

There was a moment’s silence between us. An almost tigerish glitter was in her eyes : we stood nearly facing each other ; she was much taller and

perhaps stronger than I, but my fingers had closed round her wrist with a gripe that she could not shake off.

“Do you mean to let me go?” she said.

The tone was smothered and threatening; I knew too surely that no good would come of it, but I made one other effort in Mr. Beresford’s behalf.

“You have given me no answer yet. Will you send such a message as I ask to Mr. Beresford?”

“No!”

The storm was rising; my own blood was growing hot, but I kept my indignation down, and even tried to soften my manner and the tone of my voice to conciliate her—

“I may have spoken to you too harshly; if I have, give me some proof that I was wrong. You were angry when you spoke to Mr. Beresford; give me something to say to him—one word of pity or kindness will be enough, and I will ask your pardon.”

“I am not a child to be coaxed by soft speeches,” she cried. “You shall have no word from me. If

I regretted what I have said to Edward Beresford a thousand times, *you* should never be the mediator between us. Once more, Miss Haig, will you let me go ?”

I flung her arm from me. “Yes—for I am well-nigh weary of you.”

I fell back from her—I left her free to go back to that wild waltz—or to whatever else she chose—and she was going ; she had turned and taken one swift step, when suddenly, hard as she was, she stopped again, for a whisper struck upon her ear—a struggling utterance of her name, freezing the very air with its wild agony of wretchedness. She stood arrested by its passionate cry—not willingly, but awed against herself by its great misery. Before she could regain her self-command, Mr. Beresford had sprung forward to her side ; he had seized her hand in both of his ; their eyes had met in one full gaze. He was flushed, and his lips were parted and his eyes bright with eagerness, and something which, however faint, had still a fellowship with hope. The miserable dejection, the livid anguish, were past ; there was nothing in the

feverish excitement of his look now to move a beholder to any unusual pity. And Helen was not moved.

"Give me only one moment!" he panted. "Helen, I am only going to make one prayer to-night—you know what it is. I only ask that one denial from you now—for mercy's sake, tell me I may forget those words! Helen—Helen—let me *hear* you say that the past has *not* been all a mockery!"

He paused for her answer; I do not think that she was moved by pity, but there was a tremor on her lips as she opened them, that seemed to hold the words back for a moment. When she did speak, her voice, vehement though it was, was toneless.

"I have nothing to deny," she said. "Do you *both* want to *force* me into lying?"

"It would not be a lie!" he pleaded passionately. "Helen—think—remember! long ago, when you gave me your promise first—Oh—Helen, remember! it was love *then*!"

"It was *not*!" she cried, fiercely—she was like a wild animal at bay.

“Helen!”

The voice was not a cry, but a whisper cold as ice with despair. As though its frozen breath had crept over her, she stood motionless and silent, with her wild passion all stilled before him. It was the last appeal; his final words fell from him, hollow-toned and passionless—

“I have received my answer. It has *all* been a delusion from first to last!”

She bowed her head; slowly and without a word he turned from her, like one struck with death. I saw his face for a moment—haggard as though he was an old man stooping to his grave; a second more, and he had passed me, and fled forth with head uncovered into the winter’s night.

She stood where he had left her, a wandering look, half of alarm, half of irresolution, in her eyes; I do not know what she might have said or done—that hesitating tremor of remorse might possibly have brought forth some fruits—but it was crushed in the first weak movement of its birth. There came suddenly a merry call for her—

“Helen, Helen! what on earth are you about?”

Don't you hear they are playing the Lancers—and here is Mr. Gordon disconsolate because he can't find you!" and, with a gentleman following at her heels, Caroline Wetherall burst from the dancing-room upon us.

Helen turned lightly round, and never on a human face did I see a quicker transformation. All fear, all anger, all emotion, were swept away from it; she faced Miss Wetherall with a lip wreathed with smiles—with a brow as smooth, and calm, and open, as though no storm of wrath had ever hung upon it.

"I will make Mr. Gordon fifty apologies, if he wants them!" she exclaimed; "though, indeed, I am sure he would excuse me if he knew the duration vile in which I have been kept out here—absolute bodily imprisonment!" and she joined them with a gay laugh, replying to their joking inquiries with some mocking nonsense, in which, as she tripped away, I could hear my own name playing a part.

Perhaps her gaiety was feigned then—I believe it was; but the mask soon lost its falseness. The ball was at its gayest as she rejoined it: the lights

seemed to burn with an increased blaze of brilliancy; the music swelled into still merrier and louder strains; the laughter and the gaiety were at their height; and it could scarcely be that, in the midst of such a scene, and finding herself, wheresoever she went throughout the room, the chosen star and queen, Helen should let that one dark blotch upon her merriment stain the whole of the night's brightness to her.

Yet I do not think that she forgot it. The gaiety to which she rose was not the light-hearted joy of the hours that were past; but it became an intoxication—an unnatural exuberance of merriment, wild and unrestrained even to folly and recklessness. The last hours of that night live in my memory as one continued dazzling vision of glancing lights and flashing figures, a mingled confusion of voices and laughter, and music rolling over them; and in the midst, brilliant and flushed with excitement, that radiant figure of Helen Wynter, decked in the wild merriment and the proud beauty that she never wore again.

It was all over at last: the guests were gone, the

lights were extinguished, the music had ceased ; silent and weary we stood together a few moments in the empty room, then went our ways with short words of good-night.

I was too tired to sleep. The starry night had gained a moon—a pallid silvery crescent, hanging low on the horizon ; I stood awhile resting in the new sense of silence to look forth on it. There was no ray of dawn yet, and the night lay unstirred, calm and clear : once more that fancy smote me of the death-shroud on the earth, and over it the silent stars burning their solemn watch in heaven.

CHAPTER IX.

THE NORTH WIND'S WAIL.

I WAKENED to perceive a dusky crimson glow upon the eastern sky ; but, ere the sun had passed the horizon, a phalanx of low clouds came trooping from the north, and swiftly hung all heaven with a grey drapery. A gust of wind impelled them ; but that ceased as suddenly as it had risen, and spreading themselves in one huge stratum, from north to south, from east to west, they made a dingy screen across the sky, which all that day hung low and motionless. The snow lay still upon the ground, but, sparkling no longer in the diamond light of jewelled stars, its purity looked tarnished : the leafless trees stood cold and bare, vainly desirous of an azure heaven to warm their naked branches into purple ; the evergreen leaves hung

dead upon their stems, their glossy green dimmed by the vapour of a half-thawed frost. It was so keenly cold, too—a morning that cruelly nipped one's fingers' ends—that, chilled alike by the depressing gloom which, shed down from that grey sky, seemed to wrap all nature in a universal sorrow, and by the piercing coldness of the atmosphere around me, I was fain to perform my toilette expeditiously, and hasten to the welcome comfort of a fire.

“How the wind wailed this morning before sunrise—did you hear it, Miss Haig? I am afraid it is a token of stormy weather coming.”

Mrs. Wynter stood by the large bay window in the breakfast room, and looked out upon the leaden stirless clouds, in whose bosom the summit of the grass-covered hill, low as it was, was hidden.

“It was like some living creature sobbing,” Helen said. “It wakened me, and I could not sleep again,” and she shivered as she bent over her last night's flowers.

“How still it has left every thing!” Mrs. Wynter mused. “There is not a breath stirring!

Look—every branch of those trees is as still as death !”

“ Well, never mind the wind, mamma !” called out Mr. Wynter’s hearty voice. “ Come here ! and let us have our breakfast. I do not know how *you* feel after all your dancing, young ladies ; but our late hours have made *me* hungry this morning.”

“ *I* am too tired to be hungry,” Helen said. “ Do you know, papa, I danced sixteen times last night ?”

Tired she was certainly ; but, as I noticed her look and tone, it struck me that something more than common weariness ailed her. The intoxication of last night was beginning to bring its reaction : I saw that, and with little pity.

Yet, whatever her conscience might be whispering, she did her best to drown its voice. As we sat round the breakfast-table she talked so incessantly, that, in the course of one five minutes, I three times noticed Mr. Wynter look up from his newspaper as though about to speak, and twice turn back, baffled by her volubility, before he could finally

succeed in delivering himself of the question with which he was laden. But it came out at last.

"Now, in the midst of all this," he said, "is there any one who can tell me what became of Edward Beresford? Was he hiding himself all last night, or where was he?"

Helen's lips gave out no sound; the only sign that she heard her father's question appeared in her risen colour. I was the only other person who was capable of giving a reply to Mr. Wynter's question; when, therefore, she did not speak, I said—

"He came late and went early; I saw both his entrance and his exit."

Again Mr. Wynter addressed Helen, and there was in his tone a mixture of gravity and jesting.

"What did he do that for, Nelly? Because he did not get much encouragement to stay; was that it?"

She was in no mood yet to bear any thing approaching to reproof; in the haughty raising of the flushed face, and the scornful curling of the parted lip, I guessed the kind of answer she was preparing herself to give.

But that answer was never spoken. Before a word had fallen from her, the door was slowly opened ; one of the servants, mute and hesitating, stood upon the threshold. There was a moment's pause.

" Well, Richard ? "

The summons opened the man's lips.

" Could you come out into the hall, sir ? "

" Out into the hall !—what for ? "

" There was some one wanting to speak to you, sir—Mr. Beresford's servant—if you would come out for a minute, sir."

There was something—it might be in the man's look or tone, or both—that called for attention ; without a word, rising quickly from his chair, Mr. Wynter went out.

Mrs. Wynter turned about and looked nervously towards the re-closing door.

" Dear me ! what is it, I wonder ? "

" My dear mother, what do you suspect ? " and Helen laughed ; but her merriment I thought had a strange sound in it. " It is only some message from Edward."

"Well, I suppose so, but yet it is odd—What is that? Hush!" she cried.

God knows what it was! It was a sound in the hall, neither distinct nor loud—a murmur rather than a cry; but, such as it was, it sent the blood rushing from Helen's cheek. With a wild startled look she glanced round—she half rose—

"Mother!" she cried. "Miss Haig! go to the door!"

There was no need. I rose up, but I had not taken two steps when the door re-opened: there before us again, but with his broad face blanched, stood Mr. Wynter.

"Mr. Wynter!—Frank!—oh, my God, what is it?"

His wife stood up before him: in silence he took both her hands and put her back: stern-faced, as I had never seen him before, without a syllable, he went up to Helen's chair. She had risen and stood facing him, her eyes wild with a terror beyond all utterance: she never spoke: the only words that broke the silence—and their tone

I shall remember while I live—were these, that came from him—

“Helen, it is all over between you. God forgive you ! Edward Beresford has shot himself dead !”

There came a great convulsive cry—but not from her. Dumb, white, and stiff *she* stood, her lips drawn back, her large, wild darkening eyes distending into a great unutterable horror ; like a statue but for her gasping breath ; immovable, frigid, fixed ; ghastly in her deathlike agony, with all the horror and all the hideousness of despair.

“Oh, Nelly !—oh, my poor Nelly !”

Bursting into a passion of tears, Mrs. Wynter flung herself upon her daughter's neck, but no tears did her weeping bring from Helen. Insensible alike to the sound of her emotion or the touch of her embrace, the white, marble figure never moved—till on a sudden, throwing her mother off, she flung her arms up in the air and shrieked aloud. Thrice that cry rang, curdling the blood within our hearts : when it ceased, like one felled suddenly by a blow, she sank upon the floor—a huddled mass—her white face pressing on

the ground, and when we stooped to raise her up she was quite lifeless—as cold and motionless as a corpse.

Tempest clouds had swept across the sun ; night eclipse had come at midday. To all of us, this day at Riverston was a day never to be forgotten : what it was to Helen, God only knows ! Outwardly she lay almost in the stillness of death ; but in the white ghastly face, and in the distended unclosing eyes, there were written such signs of terror-struck agony as no words could picture. Throughout the whole day she only spoke once : that single raising of her voice was a piteous appeal, uttered shivering, with clasped hands, not to be left alone !—and we obeyed it to the letter. She was never left to herself, either for that day, or for many days and nights following.

During the whole of those succeeding days her suffering never showed itself beyond the limits of a low, piteous, tearless sobbing. Even this was rare. Generally, she lay quite motionless, her eyes wide open, her white fingers pressed together, her

pallid thinning face growing hourly less and less like its former self—her whole look like that of one creeping slowly into a living death.

I could not long see her thus and remain silent. The spring was near at hand ; the tokens of its advent filled the earth, and its spirit came gushing over me like the sound of music ; I could not check it—it welled up like a spring of water in my heart—it swept across me like the gush of a great stream—it came, piercing even through the very centre of all the gloom at Riverston. I say I could not check it : I was young and full of energy and hope, and the death-like silence, the inactive suffering, the passive unstirred gloom within that chamber, were terrible to me.

I bore it till I grew restless even to feverishness. Then at length one day I strove to break it. We had been left together in the room alone ; having sat for an hour in unbroken silence, I at last rose, and going to the window silently drew up the blind, and let a slanting ray of sunshine fall across the floor. This done, without a word, quietly as I had risen, I came back, and took my seat again beside her.

She said, in the faint low voice in which, when she ever spoke at all, she spoke now—

“Why did you do that?”

“Because the room was so dark.”

“But it has been so—all the time.”

All the time! Poor Helen!

“Very true,” I said quietly, “but not by *my* will.”

She made no answer, but after a few moments she silently raised one of her hands, and placed it as a shield over her eyes. I was sewing, but I put down my work, and leant towards her.

“Do you mean that the light really pains you?”

There came a feeble—“No,” and then almost immediately the slight frame began to tremble with low sobbing.

“You think I am unkind? You are angry with me?”

I bent over her, waiting her answer. Some feeble words tried to struggle up.

“I cannot dispute with you now—I must bear what you choose to do.”

“And you mean to bear it as if I was doing you

a wrong," I said, with some sharpness ; "reserving your thanks for those who are helping you to dig your grave."

Not seeking to answer me, she only wailingly began to moan out my last words—

"My grave!—my grave!" she sobbed: "oh, that it *was*'dug, and that I was lying in it!"

"You may thank God that you are not," I said.

But probably she did not hear me: she was lying perfectly motionless, her eyes closed, her clasped hands tightly pressed together upon her bosom, dreaming too much perhaps of that grave of rest towards which her weary soul was stretching, to pay much heed to my suggested thanksgiving. I had to speak again—

"Helen, do not seek to shift your burden off into your grave. Stand up, and bear it: your life is given you that you may work it into a lighter weight."

She lifted up her large sad eyes upon me—one mourning, wistful, helpless look, but there came no words: with a heavy broken sigh she turned away, and the thin lids fell again with their old wear-

ness. But I wished to make her speak. I called her.

“Helen !”

She did not look at me, but, as I bent down waiting, the poor lips presently began to move.

“What could I do ?” she whispered plaintively. “I feel as if I had no place left in the world. Every door that used to be open seems closed against me now.”

“Then try other doors.”

“I cannot—I cannot !” she sobbed. “It is very easy for *you* to talk—you who are well and happy ; but you cannot understand what *I* feel. Honor,”—she looked up wildly, and the words broke shiveringly from her—“Honor, I feel as if a whole mountain was lying on my bosom, and I was pressed down—down into the earth !”

She hid her face upon her hands, not crying, but with a low dry feeble sobbing that was more piteous to me than any tears. It moved my heart ; I said nothing, but I raised her head into my arms, and let the poor lips sob out their weakness on my bosom.

Perhaps I gained more influence over her thus than I might otherwise have had ; for when I again spoke to her, urging anew that she *must* rouse herself from this lethargy—ay, even though a thousand mountains lay upon her with their leaden weight—she did not seek to interrupt me with one dissentient word.

“If I *could*,” she murmured at last ; “if I had only some hope—some courage—if—O God help me !” she sobbed.

I said “Amen !” and our conversation ceased ; but on the next morning, silently and of her own accord, she rose up from her couch. One step was gained, but our difficulty was still great to know in what way to find occupation for her. She was patient and passive and gentle ; but we had to think for her, and to set her tasks as if she had been a little child. She spent great part of the day in the schoolroom, for she shrank with such visible pain from the sight of any of the rooms below, that we never encouraged her entrance into them ; and occasionally I made Effie go to her with a few of her lessons, or we read to her, or

engaged her with sewing, generally carrying her such odds and ends of useful work as we really wanted done, and could make her feel that we were obliged to her for doing ; and we soon perceived that this occupation gave her a kind of feeble pleasure.

But still, in spite of employment, in spite of all that we could devise to rouse or interest her, she found no rest. Day after day, I saw the slow torturing working of the inner fever ; I saw it in the hollowed wandering eye, in the quickening nervous breathing, in the tremor that sometimes palsied her fingers while she sewed, until the needle dropped from them. But her lips were closed, and, anxiously as I regarded her, I had, I thought, from most of our former intercourse, too little reason to believe in the kindness of her feelings towards me, to justify me in seeking to gain her confidence. I judged that, disapprovingly and perhaps even harshly as I had looked on her conduct before Mr. Beresford's death, *I* should be one of the last persons from whom she would willingly have received consolation.. And probably

it might have been so had she had other friends about her: but I ought to have remembered how solitary she was, and have sought her before, in her anguish, she came at last to me.

I was on the point of dropping asleep late one night, when the stealthy opening of my door suddenly aroused me, and starting up, I became aware of Helen's white figure, advancing towards me in the moonlight.

"I am afraid I have wakened you," she said with a hurried timidity, as she saw me move. "I thought I could have come softly: I had meant if you were asleep to go away."

"I was not more than half asleep," I said. "But what is it?"

I spoke more calmly than I felt, for the sight of the pale shivering figure, creeping at this hour from its bed to steal into my room, alarmed me more than I chose that she should see.

"I wanted to speak to you," she began, with a strange hurried nervousness of tone—"at least—I mean I had something to say—about—about——"

She had come up close to my bedside; suddenly

the broken sentence ceased ; there came a gurgling sob, a convulsive spasm across her lips, and before I could prevent her she had sunk down upon her knees, hiding her face, and stretching out her arms across the bed, and bursting out into the bitter, feverish cry—

“ Oh ! Honor, I cannot rest ! I cannot rest,” she cried, “ all through the night ! I can keep the thought still sometimes in the day when you are all about me, but in the nights it drives me mad ! I could not stay with it to-night—it would not let me lie still in my bed—it gives me no rest—no rest from night till morning ! ”

There was a wildness—an excited terror in her tone, such as I had not seen in her even at the first ; and as she raised her head, and turned her pallid face to me, its convulsive look of tortured suffering, made more ghastly by the pale light, thrilled me with pity for her. But she was too excited for me to be willing to give any encouragement to her emotion.

“ Come and sleep with me, then—there is room for you here.”

"No, no—let me stay where I am," she pleaded. "I could not lie down just now. I am not cold—look—I have got my dressing-gown on."

Poor child, she was not cold, indeed! As I touched her brow I found it burning with fever; but I felt that opposition would only increase her excitement.

"Well, what can I do for you? What was it you came to say?"

She looked up full in my face, her great eyes, as they fastened upon mine, dilating and darkening till their cold fear chilled me. Her words came bursting forth, breaking the silence that fell between them and my question, less like speech than a wild quivering scream—

"He seems crying to me from hell!" she said. "I hear his voice all night!" she cried, the rapid words pressing with a panting terror on each other. "It comes even through my sleep; waking or sleeping, it is all the same; all night long, he cries to me that I have murdered both body and soul!"

She flung her arms wildly across the bed again,

shaking it in her strong shivering like one trembling in an ague fit.

I waited until the paroxysm had passed before I spoke. When I saw something like returning calmness coming to her, I addressed her quietly.

"There is no punishment by proxy in heaven, Helen. If the greatest sin in this business was yours, as it assuredly was, depend upon it, it will not be *he* who will have to bear the heaviest punishment."

She gathered in my words, gazing at me with her wild, hungry, piteous eyes.

"But he must suffer for his own deed!" she broke in impetuously. "*That* was his! I drove him to it—but oh, Miss Haig, the deed *itself* was his own!" and she wrung her hands.

"But was the *deed* all that God saw?" I asked. "Do you think it was *we* only who knew the anguish that came before, or the bitterness of the last struggle?"

"He had no time to repent," she panted, her white face working and quivering in every nerve.

"How do you know that? Upon the brink of eternity time seems sometimes as though it stood still, and made hours of moments. It might have been so with him."

There had been a feeble ray of hope in her face wrestling with its passionate fear, but as I spoke it faded out. The look she raised to me was black with despair.

"Is it *this* that I am to comfort myself with?" she asked bitterly.

"Does it give you no comfort?"

"When we are in despair we catch at straws," she cried; "but they break from our fingers when we try to grasp them. No, no—I cannot lay hold on this!"

"Lay hold, then, of a better consolation," I said. "Trust in that mercy which I for one *cannot* believe would thrust Edward Beresford down to hell, because the faith, the patience, the endurance, the self-denial that made his ten years of ministry spotless and noble, were sullied at their close by *one* weak and cowardly deed."

I had kindled the hope in her face anew; it

sprang up trembling, like a flame blown in the wind.

“Oh, tell me again!” she cried, snatching at my arm in violent agitation; “speak to me again! I see some hope—if it would stay—if it would stay! But I cannot keep it!” she moaned. “These doubts—oh, these doubts!—they come pressing on my brain—oh, Honor, help me!”

She strained both hands upon her brow with a wild look of terror, and pressed her lips till they grew bloodless. I tried to speak to her, but I think for a few moments she scarcely heard my voice.

Suddenly her hands dropped down, her lips unclosed, and rigid and white she faced me.

“Where is he, then?” she demanded. “If he is not in hell, where is he?”

She spoke almost fiercely; her eyes, as they clung upon mine, glared with the intensity of their expectation.

I could not tell her where he was, certainly; the secrets of heaven were as closed to me as to her; but, as I doubted how to answer her, a few words

came to my mind that were not my own. I spoke them to her reverently—

“ ‘ In my Father’s house are *many* mansions.’ ”

The accents fell on her strained ears. She gazed earnestly upon my face a moment, then gathered up and clasped her outspread hands, and burst into a broken cry of hope—

“ Honor,” she whispered, “ *dare* I cling to the thought of that ? ”

“ *I* have clung to it in other cases than this, Helen. When I have seen death come suddenly to some who have not been prepared to die, leaving no time to them for thought of God or of eternity—leaving no space for repentance—I have clung to those words. Somewhere among those ‘ many mansions,’ I think, there has been room found for them. God knows ! but I believe it.”

She gazed at me while I spoke, and for long afterwards, kneeling by me motionless and mute ; but her face was slowly losing its restless wildness, and her eyes gaining a softer and less fevered look. At last she spoke—

“ If it were so,” she said, “ I could bear my *own*

punishment. O God," she suddenly cried, "give me this hope! My God—my God! give me this hope!" she cried.

She threw her arms upon me, and burst into a passion of tears. For ten minutes I let her weep unrestrained. When her sobs grew fewer and fainter, weary and exhausted I drew her into my bed—and before I myself slept her eyes were closed, and her head at rest upon my bosom.

Not suddenly, but, after this night, gradually and slowly there came something like peace to her, and to peace, when a few weeks had passed, dawning strength was added. When that budding spring had reached to summer, Helen Wynter stood amongst us a beautiful and noble woman. Out of her agony she had awakened to a new being: the aspect that had quelled her, quelled her now no longer; quail she might still before it, but she shrank from it no more. Silently and sternly towards herself, she traced out the course of her future life, and entered on it. There was no delay, no flinching, no hesitation, no holding back; she chose a life that left room for no self-indulgence;

wherever deeds of mercy were to be done, wherever help was needed or comfort sought for, in distress or sickness, thither she went. Body and soul, she gave herself to her work of expiation. Hers was no playing at world-renunciation; sternly and utterly she severed herself from the life that she had led, breaking every former tie except those of blood: self-denial, self-sacrifice—these were henceforward her watchwords; faith, obedience, endurance—these were the beacon-lights by which she steered her course.

Reader, do you ask her reward? Nay, she worked not for wages in this world; happiness is no penitent's goal; it was not hers, nor did she ever reach it. In *this* world her lot has been remorse and pain; where the arrow pierced, there its barb has rested; she never learnt to forget her wound—only to hide it—to draw her garment silently over its red stain.

One other word, and then I leave her.

Once more, and once only, did I ever again see Captain Carlyon. On the fatal morning after Mr. Beresford's death he came to Riverston, and as he

turned away from the door, that for the first time refused to give him entrance, I saw him. Slowly and reluctantly he departed, and once, pausing and looking back, glanced with grave anxious searching from window to window, faintly hoping, perhaps, to find some face that would recall him ; but there was none, and he turned again and went on his way—and finished the last journey that he ever made to Riverston.

I have often since recalled that final look of the brave handsome face, wondering on what new scenes its bright frank eyes were gazing, and musing if perchance the thought of Helen and that short love tragedy ever came across his vision, as a dark spot between him and the sun. For *her*, if thoughts of him, as I think they must, returned to her when the bitterest anguish of her grief had passed, she kept them in her own heart ; his name never more crossed her lips.

CHAPTER X.

EFFIE.

I HAD thought my pupil Effie very handsome when I saw her first, yet that night's meeting had scarcely prepared me for the powerful influence her beauty soon grew to have upon me. Before less than a week had passed, the pleasure that I took in tracing every delicate line, and watching every varying look upon her face, was so intense, that, passionately as I love all beautiful things, the power she exercised over me surprised even myself.

It was not an ordinary childish loveliness; there was something in the face such as in a child's I never saw before—a depth of almost matured expression, grave, earnest at times, even wistfully pleading, that often made me think of her more as a glorious idealized picture, than an actual living

child. It was not a face ever to grow weary of. I never looked upon her as she came newly towards me, I never returned the long gaze of her grave dark luminous eyes, but the sense of her beauty thrilled me with a delight that never wore away. I would not have had one line of her face changed ; I would not even have had its imperfections altered—the mouth large in proportion to the other features ; the slightly straightened upper lip—for faults, though these certainly were, they gave a character and individuality to the face, whose loss would have been recompensed by no perfectness of form. I am not speaking lightly, reader, in common terms of novel-writing exaggeration, when I call Effie Wynter the most beautiful of all children I have ever seen ; for, even while I say this deliberately, I still do not put her forward as any miracle of loveliness (many might have passed her by, calling her a handsome child, and never have thought of her again) : I tell you only what she was in *my* eyes ; even to me she was not dearer than all other children, or more loveable than all.

I am not an indiscriminate lover of children. I have no desire whatever to take every child I see into my heart, or even into my arms, or to pour kisses upon every pair of lips, baby or otherwise, that may be ready to receive them. But when it does so happen that a child meets my fancy, be it what it may, beautiful or plain, attractive or unattractive to other people, I love it with all my soul. I love it with a kind of hungry yearning, a longing to take possession of it, and bend its heart to me: I love it with a reverence that leads me to lie humbly at its feet, and kiss its little white pure hands, blessing it in the voiceless depths of my soul for every dear caress it gives me. Some of my best and purest—I do not speak about my happiest, though I might say these, too—some of my best and purest hours of life have been spent alone with children. I thank God for them! I think with sorrow and humility, that had the number of them been greater, in years that are gone, I might be nearer heaven than I am now.

Effie Wynter grew very dear to me. She was not a faultless child by any means, or one whom

it was very easy to manage aright. Even my knowledge of her character was for some time imperfect enough; it was not very easily read, and she somewhat retarded me at first in my observations, by the adoption in her manner towards me of a grave, watchful, suspicious reserve, which it was not easy to penetrate. I made little of her for a day or two. She was very earnest at her lessons, full of intelligence and eagerness, very quick to learn, and, though self-willed and capricious enough, by no means so obstinate, I found, as to be at all unmanageable: but, lesson-time over, she became impenetrable, and through the rest of the day her grave suspicious eyes would follow me in all I did or said, with a silent watchfulness that nothing could divert. I did not trouble myself much about this reserve; I saw that she would come to a conclusion about me presently; and therefore, until this time should arrive, I thought it best to make no active efforts to secure her affections.

One day when school time was over—it was the third day after my arrival—Mrs. Wynter came

across us as we were preparing to set out on our daily walk.

"Effie, when are you going to take Miss Haig to see aunt Grace?" she asked.

The child caught at the proposal with eagerness.

"May we go now? Miss Haig, will you go now?" she said.

I had no objection, so with mutual agreement we presently set forth.

They had spoken to me before of this aunt Grace—Mrs. Grace Ramsay, as her full name was. She was a half-sister of Mr. Wynter's, and her husband had been Mrs. Wynter's brother; consequently her connection with the Riverston family was a double one. Mr. Ramsay had, however, been long dead, and she was a widow now, and, besides this, an invalid and a cripple. "She met with an accident long ago," Mrs. Wynter told me; "she has not walked for many years."

Our way lay through the Riverston grounds, for Mrs. Ramsay's house adjoined one portion of them, and, to avoid the round that taking the high-road would have occasioned, a door had been opened in

the southern boundary wall, which afforded a direct communication with her residence.

I had been but three days at Riverston, and was little familiar as yet with much of its surroundings. I had explored the garden, and, with Effie for guide, had climbed the grassy hill, and from its summit looked down upon the nestled house, which even now in mid-winter seemed to bid defiance to all winter's storms, so still and green it lay in its garmenting of laurel-leaf and ivy ; and I had made acquaintance with some sheltered walks, where giant skeletons of trees spread out their naked arms to embrace the keen north winds, letting us walk beneath their great bared branches, hearing, yet scarcely feeling, the gales that bent them : but this was all, and the way our walk took us to-day was altogether new to me.

We went along a path that led us to a wooded dell, all brown yet underfoot with the last autumn's fallen leaves : we might have skirted it, following the pine-belted pathway marked along its summit ; but the ground was dry with frost, and the wintry afternoon brilliant with a glowing sunlight, which,

far down in the bottom of the dell, danced on the new-thawed waters of a stream, whose tiny trickling reaching to our ears filled me with a spring yearning, and made me, almost before it was well uttered, give willing assent to the petition which Effie made, that we might make our way down the rough bank to the bottom of the hollow.

It was almost warm there when we reached it. The place was so sheltered that not a breath of wind disturbed us: high up we saw the bare boughs swaying to and fro, but where we were each branch and twig and blade of grass was motionless as in a picture. It was a little spot of rough and rugged nature—a corner cut off from the surrounding cultivation, to live alone in its own native loveliness and wildness. No training hand had been at work upon it; the wooded banks were even now a tangled jungle, with long prickly branches of wild bramble matting the young pine-trees together; the grassy bank that sloped on one side down to the stream was broken into innumerable knolls of earth and jutting fragments of grey rock; the stream itself leaped at its own sweet will

from stone to stone, and danced with joyous freedom along its pebbly bed. We sat down upon a stone that had been flung out from it, and listened to the soft murmur of its waters, with no other sound from far or near disturbing us, except the occasional low sobbing of the wind far overhead in the pine branches.

"We must come away, Effie, or Mrs. Ramsay will see little of us this afternoon," I said with some reluctance; for the balmy air in that keen wintry weather greatly tempted me to stay longer; but we had already lingered a quarter of an hour or more, and the sky, as I saw, was beginning to show signs of sunset.

We retraced our steps therefore up the steep bank, and walked once more onwards under the pine-trees, until, in the southern wall, we came at last to a small door which admitted us within the trim and pretty garden that surrounded Mrs. Ramsay's house.

We found Mrs. Ramsay in an up-stairs sitting-room, whither Effie led me.

She was a small slight woman. She was not

old, but the face was worn and pale with pain or sorrow, and the brown of the braided hair that peeped from beneath her widow's cap was thickly mixed with white. It was a gentle earnest strong face, very lovely in a calm and pure and deep serenity, that, lying on it like a veil of light, smoothed down the lines of its sharp suffering. She sat leaning back in a cushioned chair; she made no attempt to rise when we entered; it was evident, although as she sat there was no sign of deformity in her, that she was unable to stand upright.

We stayed with her above an hour, though the winter's day even when we came was verging towards its close; but as we sat in her warmed and perfumed room, I by her side and Effie at her feet, the time went quickly. Invalid as she was in appearance, this Mrs. Grace Ramsay, her bodily maladies had cast no shadow of sickness on either her mental or moral temperament. In all she said, quiet and even a little subdued though she was, there was a tone of healthy and serene cheerfulness; a spirit of clear, calm, pious wisdom; a warm and strong affection for, and a full sympathy with, those

around her—which I always thought both beautiful and refreshing to hear and see in one who had so much both of pain and sorrow to bear in her own life.

I soon perceived that a very earnest love subsisted between her and Effie. During our whole visit the child sat at her feet, her hands stretching up to clasp and often to kiss the thin pale fingers that were surrendered to her caress; and while we talked, though her own lips were seldom opened, her beautiful face was either raised in a long steadfast loving gaze to Mrs. Ramsay's, or buried with a shower of kisses on her knees.

I had never yet seen such demonstration of affection in her, but it surprised far less than it pleased me; for though I had not been able to hide from myself that there was a certain coldness in her manner, as well towards her mother as towards Helen, I had by no means yet parted with the belief that she was capable of forming very deep attachments. The truth was, that her immediate environment at home was not such as to call her strongest affections into play. A clever, daring,

self-willed child, full of strong and ill-regulated passions, intensely in earnest in all she did and felt, proud, sensitive, and reserved, she was not likely to receive much sympathy from any of those who surrounded her—not certainly from Helen, vain, gay, and frivolous as she was then—not from her dreamy, quiet, gentle mother, who, love her as dearly as she might, had it not in her to reach to the heights or fathom the depths of a nature so earnest and passionate as Effie's; and, as for Mr. Wynter, his honest, rough-hewn mind would have been about as much at home in dissecting the intricacies and refinements of hers as his fingers in undoing the delicate machinery of a timepiece.

I had been intensely sorry for the child; for the dumb yearning I had seen in her for some other companionship had touched me deeply, and already drawn my heart more towards her than perhaps I was even myself quite conscious of. The sight of this strong affection between her and Mrs. Ramsay gave me no small satisfaction. I rejoiced for the happiness that it must give to her: I rejoiced in

the confirmation it afforded to my hitherto unproved belief, that she had the capacity in her of loving very strongly : lastly, it stirred me up to endeavour to gain a similar affection from her, for the sight of her lavished caresses roused something in me of the wild-animal jealousy which I have often thought slumbers at most times lightly enough in my bosom.

“ You must come and see me again,” Mrs. Ramsay said to me as we were taking our leave. “ I have nothing, as you see, to offer you except a cordial welcome ; but you shall have that as often as you like to come for it. I am very glad you came to-day. You have relieved me from what has been a greater anxiety than I feel it ought to have been to me. Thank you, my dear—thank you, very heartily ! ”

There was no lingering on our homeward journey : we had scarcely allowed ourselves time to reach the house before the dinner-hour, and our returning walk through the darkening grounds was in consequence a very hurried one. Its haste, indeed, gave so powerful an impulse to a headache with

which I had been slightly threatened all the morning, that, when dinner was over, I found myself obliged to retire to my own room and lie down for a few hours.

I had been there for some time alone, when I was roused from a state of partial dreamy repose into which I had fallen, by the sound of a light timid tap outside my door. It dissipated the thin cloud of sleep which had crept over me, and, raising my head, I bade the intruder come in. It was Effie, as I could just distinguish through the gloom, for it was a cloudy night, and the young moon was veiled. She came up to my bedside before she spoke to me.

“Miss Haig, are you any better?”

She had a slow, almost dreamy way of speaking to me at most times; I could not tell now, as she asked this question in her low measured voice, whether she had any interest in the answer I should give.

“Not very much, Effie,” I said.

She stood for a moment or two twisting the bed-curtains in her fingers—she had a restless

habit of never letting her hands be still ; then she asked again—

“ Is there not any thing that would do you good ?
Could not I get you any thing ? ”

“ No, dear, I think not. I shall be better presently.”

My headache had made me languid, or I should have done more than merely reply to her questions. She might, perhaps, have thought my manner cold, poor child, and have fancied herself repulsed, for in some things she was wonderfully timid ; at any rate, when I answered her she said no more, but, lingering only for a few moments longer, turned silently round to go away. But her motion of departure roused me ; I could not afford to let her go so.

“ Effie ! ” I said.

“ Yes,” and she looked back, and stood still.

“ Effie, come here.”

She came again slowly ; I felt for her hands as she stood, and took them both in mine, and kissed them. I held them on my lips with mine above them, and kissed them twice—thrice.

She stood by me for a moment or two quite passively—I did not, in truth, expect any demonstration from her ; but, when I was almost about to free her hands and let her go, she all at once, without a word, crept close to me, and crouching to my pillow, laid down her face on mine.

I took her in my arms and held her ; there was no confession of love on either side—we did very well without that ; the silent covenant that we made with one another that night was firm enough to remain thenceforward unbroken during all the time I stayed at Riverston.

CHAPTER XI.

APPEARS IRRELEVANT.

WE were sitting one April evening after dinner in the drawing-room, when the quiet of our small party was broken by the entrance of an unexpected visitor. Mrs. Wynter started up to meet him.

“Oh, dear me—William Rupert!” she exclaimed.

“You are surprised to see me, I suppose?” Mr. Rupert said. “I should have written had I thought sooner about coming, but my mind was only made up this morning. How are you all? How do you do, Miss Haig?”

The Wynters had known Mr. Rupert from his boyhood—he was the son of an old friend (now dead) of Mr. Wynter’s—a London banker; nor was this the first time that I had seen him at

Riverston. Two or three weeks after my arrival, he having then newly returned from a sojourn of several years upon the continent, he had been with us for a couple of days, and had during that time expended upon us so large an amount of genial warmth and sunshine, that I for one confess to have felt a sincere regret at his departure ; nor was I ill-disposed to greet this his second advent with a hearty welcome ; for in truth Riverston was not too cheerful at this time, and I had been living for the last month with a curb upon me, that in the brightening and lengthening spring days galled me at times not a little.

But the pleasure I experienced during the first moments of his re-appearance became quickly damped ; for, before five minutes had elapsed, I perceived that either he or his mood had changed greatly since his former visit. He had been singularly light-hearted then, full of life and energy and high spirits, his cheek bronzed with health, and his bright hazel eyes for ever alight with mirth. But a change that baffled my comprehension had come over him. It was not only that

he was out of spirits, or that he looked ill, but his very bearing was changed. Before, it had been frank and proud as ever was that of English gentleman ; now, to my eyes, the whole man seemed shrunken.

As soon as I could, I left him alone with the Wynters, for I concluded that he had scarcely made this sudden visit without some special object ; and if, as I presumed, he had come to acquaint them with the cause of his depression, the sooner he had this satisfaction, I thought, the better. Very shortly, therefore, after Effie went to bed, I made some slight excuse for following her example, and, bidding them good-night, took my departure.

When I saw Mr. Rupert again on the following morning, he was on the point of starting to catch the early coach to London. He bade me farewell with somewhat, as it appeared to me, of a lightened manner, and I was glad to see that the hurry of departure, or perhaps the freshness of the morning air, had called back a portion of the old warm glow to his cheek.

“ I really think he looks better than he did last

night—does he not ? ” Mrs. Wynter said, as she stood at the opened door, looking with kindly interest after the retreating figure.

“Decidedly ! ” I said ; and I added smiling, “Riverston would grow famous if it worked many such cures.”

“Ah—but it is not a *cure*—I wish it was ! ” she said quickly. “Poor fellow—he is so out of spirits just now about some bad news he has heard ! I never saw such a change as it has made in him ; really, he quite frightened me last night, till he told me what it was.”

“Poor fellow ! ” she again repeated after a few moments’ silence. “It is so sad for him ; but still it might have been worse—oh, yes ! it might have been worse ! Well, dear, let us come in ; it is rather cold standing here.”

And in accordingly we went, and closed the door, and I heard no more on the mysterious subject of Mr. Rupert’s sorrows.

I had been struck when I saw him first by a certain generous unselfishness of character, and kind and considerate thoughtfulness for other

people, which I perceived very strongly marked in him. I was still more impressed by these traits after his second visit, on account of an incident which came shortly afterwards to my knowledge.

I was one day—about a week after that unexpected appearance of his—making my way to the breakfast-room, when I heard Mrs. Wynter's voice calling to me from the further end of the passage I was crossing. When I went to her, I found her standing in the centre of an empty room—one which I had been told, when soon after my arrival she showed me over the whole house, had not been put to any use for many years—surveying its capabilities with a look of considerable perplexity.

“My dear, will you come in? Look here—what do you think can be made of this?” she said.

I thought a good deal might be made of it, for it was a tolerably-sized and very cheerful room; but as I had no conception for what purpose—it might have been any thing, from a drawing-room to a store closet—she was requiring it, my answer was naturally obliged to be rather ambiguous.

"I think it might be turned to account in many ways," I said. "It seems quite dry, and the aspect is very good."

"Yes, it was always intended for a housekeeper's room—only, you see, I have never kept a housekeeper; but I have been thinking lately—or rather it has been proposed—that is, dear, Mr. Wynter and I have been talking the matter over, and we have almost come to the conclusion that it would be best perhaps to have one."

I was too well used to Mrs. Wynter's timid nervousness in carrying out, or at times in even speaking of, some new plan, to feel any surprise now at her hesitating and half-confused manner of conveying this small piece of news to me; I merely inquired—

"Do you know of any one who would be likely to suit you?"

"Why—yes," she said. "Why—in fact, if I had not heard of some one, I don't know if I should have thought about the thing at all just now—but this is how it is. William Rupert, amongst other things that night he was here, was speaking to us

about some one—about a poor girl that he is a good deal interested in. It is a long story, and, as it was told me in confidence, I must not repeat it all; but this poor thing—she was brought up quite as a lady—made a wretched marriage, and—and the end of it is that she has left the man—and it was quite right of her—quite right of her!—and now some of her relations have turned their backs on her, for they were against the whole thing from the first, and indeed, poor thing, it seems she is half heart-broken; and when Mr. Rupert told us all this sad story—he had—he had known her father, and was very anxious to do something for her—well, then, it seemed to us that we might take her here as housekeeper, and so William Rupert was to speak to her—or at least to communicate with her about it; and the end of it is that we had a letter from him this morning—and, in fact, the matter is now pretty well settled.”

“So Mr. Rupert did not find his own griefs enough to fill his head that night,” I said, with some warmth. “I wish all the world was as unselfish!”

It was a bright afternoon in May when our expected housekeeper Mrs. Hammond arrived. We were sitting with Helen when a servant came to announce that she was below. Poor Mrs. Wynter rose up very nervous and flurried.

"I had better go down—don't you think? You would rather not have her brought up here, Nelly?"

"Not unless you wished it."

"Oh no, dear!"—and, meekly resigning her hope of countenance, away the timid little woman went.

She came back to us in less than a quarter of an hour, and sat down without a word.

"Well, mother?"

"Well, dear—she is come"—rather nervously.

"And what do you think of her?"

"I hardly know—I can scarcely tell yet—she does not say much; but she is so pretty!—oh Nelly, she is so pretty—poor thing!"

When I saw Mrs. Hammond, which was not until the following day, I fully agreed in Mrs. Wynter's report of her good looks. But the face

shocked me—it was like a face turned into stone. I never shall forget the look of those marble, bloodless, rigid features, fixed and passionless as if the life had gone out of them at some sudden shock, and left them for ever sealed with one motionless, stern look. I do not call it *expression*, for expression in the face there properly was none: the dogged proud will, that had triumphed to the suppression of even *this* dumb evidence of her sorrow, was the one sole characteristic that was legible upon it. And yet this stern determination to wipe off the very flesh-marks of her suffering, always appeared to me to defeat the very purpose which she laboured to accomplish; for I think no natural or unrestrained expression, let it speak as poignantly as it might either of sorrow or anger, could ever have impressed me, as her rock-like, passionless face always did, with such certainty of the intense rage and bitterness that lay seething in her masked soul.

She was a woman whom it was hard to like, or even with heartiness to respect: *I* never attempted to do either the one or the other. In spite of my

knowledge of much that she had suffered, and the genuine pity for her which I had at first, I very soon became convinced that I should, with as much likelihood, find myself indulging in an *épanchement de cœur* towards one of the stone figures that stood in the entrance hall, as towards this stony, impenetrable, sealed woman.

The Wynters themselves made little more of her than I did. They were exceedingly attentive and kind to her; they even at first, knowing what her bringing up had been, would have treated her almost as an equal, but she repulsed them in every attention that they tried to show her, by the assumption of such cold and even haughty reserve, that at last, from sheer inability to know what else to do, they were forced to leave her to herself, and allow her to fall quietly into the position amongst the household which her title assigned to her—a position from which, it was very evident, she had no desire to be raised.

There is little more, reader, concerning my first year at Riverston which for my present purpose I find it necessary to tell you. Our life was

quiet enough: the one great event that had stamped its gloomy stain upon the year's commencement brought a lull after it, which was unbroken for many succeeding months.

During the summer we saw a good deal of Mr. Rupert: he came to us several times, and rarely remained less than a few days with us. As the months went by, I was glad to perceive that he regained a good deal of his former cheerfulness. The spirit was indeed too elastic to be crushed by one blow, however severe; and I noted with hearty pleasure how, at each new visit, he was rising from his first depression, and growing more into the likeness of his former self.

In the beginning of November he came to bid us farewell for a time, as he was going northwards for some months. He intended in the course of the winter, he told us, to be in Edinburgh, and presently we heard through Sydney Wynter that he had arrived there, and presented himself to her.

There was some talk of Sydney's coming home

this Christmas; her visit had already been a long one; but when the time drew near the weather was stormy, and it was agreed that it would be better to delay her return until a more propitious season.

CHAPTER XII.

MAY-DAY.

SYDNEY WYNTER came home at last.

It was in the full flush and beauty of my second spring at Riverston that she came, upon that "gladdest day of all the glad new year"—the opening day of May.

She travelled home by sea—in those days it was still the most usual manner of passing between London and Edinburgh—and two days before we expected to see her Mr. Wynter journeyed up to London, to be in readiness to meet her. She was expected to arrive there upon the evening of the 30th of April; we therefore looked for her at Riverston some time upon the following day.

It was a beautiful May day. Our spring was backward, for the winter had lingered long; it

had laid its frozen hand on April shower and sunshine, it had quenched the April breezes in its lion's roar. The earth was already stirring to its resurrection, when, heralding its coming with tempest blast, back swept the wintry storm, and for a week wild wailing winds tore over us, rain dashed on our window panes, mass upon mass of brooding clouds hung out their dusky pennons over heaven. It was the final struggle of the grim old winter: when his battle ceased, from out the last sobs of his threatening the young fresh spring once more arose—a sunny gladness wafted from the south in soft sea-breezes, and all budding green with bursting leaves, and golden with a dawning of pale flowers.

In the afternoon of this May-day it was that Sydney Wynter came. I saw her arrival, though I was not near to her. I had gone with my impatient Effie down the avenue that we might watch for her at the gate, when, before we had half-reached that post, a sound of far off wheels struck on my ear.

“Effie—hark!”

She stood still, breathless with hope: undoubtedly there was a carriage on the road.

"We can see from the acacia-trees," I said.

She was at them in a moment; it was a small clump of trees, from which, until the clothed summer branches made a screen, we could catch a short, imperfect glimpse of the high-road. The carriage had not passed yet; it came as we stood—a chaise driving rapidly.

"Oh, it *is* Sydney!" Effie cried, and she clapped her hands: as I looked at her, she was pale to her very lips with excitement.

"Away with you then, and tell them!" I said. "Don't break your neck, dear child—there is time enough."

But she burst from me, and sped to the house like a young fawn.

I did not follow her. I left the avenue, and, making a circuit, brought myself facing the house, but at a distance from it. From thence I watched the arrival, but I was too distant to achieve more than the mere sight of the figure of Sydney as she alighted, and was received into her mother's arms.

In a few moments they all disappeared within the house ; and I, leaving the shadow of the trees, continued my afternoon's walk alone.

We were to dine at half-past five. I had returned to the house some time before that ; but I remained in my own room till within a few minutes of the dinner hour. When I at length descended to the drawing-room, I found them all assembled there before me.

The first object that my eye fell upon was Sydney. The rest were seated ; she alone, the most conspicuous amongst them, was standing beside the fire, resting one arm upon the broad marble mantel-shelf, with her head half turned, and thrown upon her shoulder. The attitude was perfectly easy and perfectly graceful ; yet there was in it an air of studied arrangement that made me at the first glance more than half-inclined to smile.

She raised her head as I came in, and looked at me for a moment without moving ; then, as if by a sudden recollection, roused herself, and stepping forward interrupted her mother as she was going to speak—

"I do not need any one to introduce me to Miss Haig," she said, very composedly.

She smiled a little gravely, and put out a hand, the sparkling glitter of whose abundant rings attracted me to observe its own excessive beauty, and, at the same time, raised a pair of dark eyes to my face, which sent a quick glance of examination like a flash across me.

"No—our *names* at least, are pretty familiar, I suppose, to each of us," I said.

I moved on, and took my seat a few paces from the others, and, as I left her, Sydney again returned to her first position.

I could see her very well from where I sat. She was not pretty. She was middle-sized and slightly made; the face was rather small, squarely formed, and spare. She had a broad, compact, well-developed forehead, dark brows and eyes—the last, though not remarkable either in size or in general colouring, yet singularly, and even at times, as I afterwards knew, startlingly expressive; a small, not ill-formed nose; a mouth large, firm, and sharply chiselled. She was pale, and rather

dark, but her complexion had none of the rich warm softness of a brunette ; except for the faintest tinge of brown, it was cold and colourless. She had dark, thick, fine hair, dressed in a crop of short curls round her head—so short, that at a first glance they gave something almost of a boyish character to her appearance ; but this was a defect which decreased daily. It had been occasioned by her being ordered, after a severe illness she had gone through before leaving home, to keep her head shaved for some months, and the hair had only been allowed to grow again since the past summer.

I said she was slight in figure, but the figure itself was not good. It was graceful and easy in its action ; but in an artistic point of view it had many faults. She was aware of them evidently—as indeed I soon perceived she was of every good or bad point in her whole appearance ; and she dressed so as to make them as little conspicuous as possible. Her present attire was a robe of blue silk, rich and darkly full in hue, made high to the throat, with the open-cuffed sleeves, which were

then beginning to come into fashion, cut wider than were yet customary, so as to display some portion of the arm. She had good reason for adopting this form, for the one thoroughly beautiful point about her was her hand and arm. Most beautiful they certainly were; I have looked on many a handsome hand before and since, but the beauty of Sydney's remains with me yet, supreme above that of any woman I ever knew. What its loveliness was to *her* I soon learnt to know.

"My dear, I cannot think why you don't sit down," Mrs. Wynter said, in a tone almost of distress. "Just think—after you have been travelling all day!"

"But, my dear mother, it is quite a rest to stand up; I am tired out with sitting."

"You always did like standing about so strangely, Sydney. Dear me, lassie, it is like old times to see you!"

"Is it, mother?" and Sydney smiled, but the question was asked somewhat sadly.

"It is very pleasant to have you again, dear.

When you were away, did you ever think of us at home ? ”

“ Very often, mother.”

“ But did you ever want to be back amongst us? Ah, Sydney ! ” cried her father, laughing, “ there was not too much of that, I am afraid ! ”

She turned round with her bright eyes towards him—

“ Papa, sometimes I wanted to be home more than I wanted any thing in the world.”

“ Did you ? Well—I am sure we wanted *you*. The house has never been quite right since you went. William Rupert would tell you that, I am sure. By the way, Sydney, you saw a good deal of him, did you not ? ”

Her mother’s question, simple as it seemed, produced a curious effect on Sydney. A slight start was followed by a swift momentary glance shot out from under her drooped eyelids, and a sudden flushing of the blood to her cheek ; but that this involuntary emotion in her sprang from any pleasurable feelings, a peculiarly impatient and even angry contraction of the brows forbade

the belief. She evidently, too, wished to conceal its signs from other eyes, for she hastily used means to shade her face.

"Yes," she said coldly, but with perfect composure ; "we saw him rather often ; grandmamma liked him."

"And did not you ?" I felt sorely inclined to ask, but I prudently restrained my curiosity, and held my peace. The rest possibly considered it a superfluous question.

"He has gone somewhere about Ayrshire, has he not ?"

"Yes—I believe so."

"Did he not tell you, dear ?"

"I did not see him the last time he called ; I was out—at least I had to go out."

"Oh—that was a pity !"

No response.

"There was a letter from him here a fortnight ago," Mr. Wynter said. "He was just leaving Edinburgh at that time. I suppose he will be back in London before long ?"

"I don't know."

"He is in tolerably good spirits now, is he not, my dear?" Mrs. Wynter asked.

"I believe so; he is in as good spirits as most people."

"But you know, Sydney, a year ago one would have said much more than that of him."

"Well but, dear mother"—laughing a little scornfully—"I can't compare him with what he was a year ago. He is not as high-spirited as he was when he was a boy, certainly; but I suppose that may be said of most men."

"Very probably, my dear; but come away to dinner now, and show us what sort of appetite your Edinburgh air has given you;" and Mr. Wynter put Sydney's arm within his, and carried her off to the dining-room.

"Is she like what you expected?" Helen asked me a few hours afterwards, as I paused for a moment at her opened door on the way to my own room.

"Not the least," I said. "I expected something girlish, and high-spirited, and lively——"

"She used to be all that, Honor," Helen inter-

rupted rather sadly ; “but I don’t know—she is very much changed. I have been trying in vain all night to imagine her quite the same Sydney who went away.”

“The old Sydney will come back more vividly in a day or two.”

“Yes, in some things ; but she has grown so womanly and so grave, and, above all, so much more self-dependent than she used to be.”

“These are changes for the better. Go away to bed, Nelly, and think no more of Sydney for to-night.”

CHAPTER XIII.

BY A BROOK.

I COULD ill have borne it had Effie thrown off her allegiance to me when her sister came ; for, as I have told you, I am keenly jealous of love that I have a right to, and the child had wound herself by this time so closely about my heart's fibres that they would have bled, and caused me many a sore inward spasm, had she attempted to take herself from me : fortunately she did not.

They had been together, the morning after Sydney's arrival, to see Mrs. Ramsay. I had given Effie a holiday, and, for almost the first time since I came to Riverston, I neither saw nor heard her for the space of several hours. It was another bright day, and, having no business that detained me in the house, I took my case of painting mate-

rials out with me, and, remembering a long unfulfilled intention to make a sketch of a certain portion of that wooded dell into which, on our first day's visit to Mrs. Ramsay, you may recollect that we penetrated, I bent my steps thither, and was soon—a stone my seat, and a larger stone my table—pleasantly employed upon my work.

My sketch was a bank by the stream's side, steep, rugged, rocky ; the bare stone projecting here and there in dark rough blocks, stained from their natural grey to a darker hue by the action of many winters ; but the effect of the picture was not sombre. Spring's tender foliage flung over it a smiling beauty ; prodigally she clothed it, richly she shook her full hand over it ; moss crept over its browned rock, wild-flowers starred its crevices, primrose and violet roots crowded its hollows ; at its foot, dazzling in May sunshine, the tiny river leapt over a bar of stone, and sent its spray, a fairy shower of rain, over the budding leaves and mossy rock.

I sat and painted through the afternoon. The subject pleased me ; I was in a mood to do it

justice ; I felt it growing beneath my hand with a keen satisfaction. I bestowed more pains than usual upon it. I brought out the lights and shadows well, I drew the forms carefully of leaves and flowers, I borrowed my purest tints to represent their colours ; my work pleased me.

I was still employed in putting the final touches to it when I heard Effie's voice overhead, coming from the entrance to the pine walk. I had been expecting her for some time ; as she came nearer, I made a trumpet of my hands and called her. She was quick of hearing, and came at my first summons, plunging into the midst of the brushwood, and leaping down the steep, half-marked path with the fearless security of a wild fawn. Foreseeing the probable termination of her impetuous descent, I hastily laid aside my drawing, and pushed my palette of wet colour from me, hardly accomplishing even this small preparation before she sprang upon me.

" Oh you dear thing, to think of you being here alone!" she cried. " I could not think where I was to find you!" And she flung her arms about my

neck, and clasped me in them with an energy that threatened to be dangerous.

“And now that you *have* found me, you need not make an end of me,” I said. “Let go, you monkey—I don’t want to be smothered by you! There, keep your hands where I put them. Now, what have you been doing? Where is your sister?”

“I don’t know; I left her up at the top. Oh, there she is!” and Effie pointed upwards.

Sydney was standing on the edge of the bank looking down on us; when we turned to her, she made a laughing signal of recognition, and began immediately to descend, coming down the steep path less swiftly certainly than Effie, but with an unhesitating firmness and grace, that aroused no little admiration in me.

“So *you* haunt this dell of mine?” she exclaimed as she came near. “I did not know I was to have a rival in my dominions.”

“I was not aware that this was an appropriated territory,” I said laughingly; “however, if you insist upon it, I will pay you tribute.”

“But suppose I require absolute possession?”

"Then we must declare war, for I refuse to evacuate."

"You do?"

"Absolutely."

"Effie, what must we do with her? Shall we turn her out?"

"Turn Miss Haig out!" Effie exclaimed, opening her great eyes. She had seated herself on the ground at my feet; she turned round as she spoke, throwing her arm across my knees, and pressing me to her with a half-caressing, half-protecting movement.

"Yes," Sydney said laughingly, "if she won't go peaceably."

"It will be two against one then," I said, "for Effie will join with me."

"Eh, Effie, you wouldn't do that—would you, lassie?" And Sydney stooped her beautiful hand on Effie's head.

"I don't know, if you were unkind to *her*!"

The hand was withdrawn rather quickly; something that was not altogether satisfaction dawned for a moment in Sydney's face; but she concealed

the expression almost immediately, and answered with a careless laugh—

“I must swallow my dignity then, I suppose; it is no use declaring war if my only ally threatens to go over to the enemy. Well,” and she turned quickly to me, “what are you going to offer me for tribute?”

“There is something for a first payment,”—and I gave her my morning’s work.

She received it with a little cry of surprise, the whole face changing in an instant, from its look of half-dissatisfied jesting to an expression of the frankest pleasure; she threw herself upon the grass, keeping possession of the drawing, and comparing it again and again with its original, with a curious delight that made her eye dilate and sparkle. She placed it at last upright against a stone, and, turning round, regarded me with a gaze of the utmost earnestness.

“Miss Haig,” she exclaimed abruptly, “I would give five years of my life if I could do that!”

“I thought that you *did* draw,” I said.

She flung a glance upon me that was almost indignant.

"I! yes—I draw certainly!"

"Well, what is the matter with your drawing?"

"Every thing! You should see my portfolio to get your question answered. I have not the power to draw a thing as it ought to be done. I don't believe I ever drew the form of a hill, or the outline of a tree, but it came wretchedly short of what I meant it to be. I could no more make a sketch like *that*, than I could paint one of Raphael's cartoons."

"With this only difference," I suggested coolly, "that a few months would teach you to do the one, while your life's study would never make you capable of the other. If you want to draw, why don't you work at drawing?"

"Because my incapability disgusts me; an hour's drawing makes me feverish for the day; I wear myself out in vain efforts to repair the faults I commit."

"That can only be the case if you have no one to direct you."

"In great measure—yes." But I fancied that she had not been prepared for the admission, and made it with some reluctance.

"You could draw, if Miss Haig would correct your drawings, Sydney," Effie said.

The answer came promptly, with a good deal both of coldness and *hauteur* in its accent—

"I am not going to lay the correction of my faults upon Miss Haig, Effie."

I smiled, but said nothing: we were as yet too much strangers to one another for me to press offers of service upon her. I left her for the present to the indulgence of her little spirt of pride—not liking her the less for it. Perhaps she felt some little curiosity to ascertain what its effect had been upon me; for after a few moments she raised a rather uncertain glance to my face, and swiftly read enough of the feeling that was written there to send the colour rather suddenly to her cheek. That sign of detection was, however, quickly suppressed. Shaking back her hair, she sent another curiously keen look upon me; and then both lips and eyes broke into a half-defiant smile. With this she

turned away, and, leaning back, lay down with her head resting on her arm, listening for some minutes in silence to the ripple of the stream, and following its motion with her eyes.

Bright reflections lay on the water of sky and cloud ; sunshine pierced its lucid depths ; ceaseless life stirred its current ; breaking over the stones with its tiny dash and foam, on it flowed—impetuous, restless, beautiful.

“I wonder if any one was born to live in idleness !” Sydney exclaimed presently. “If I could reconcile my conscience to that pleasant creed, I think I should spend my life by some river’s side, lying under the shadow of some great tropic tree ; or become a lotus-eater, perhaps, and fairly bury myself in dreams.”

“I should not think that you were made for lotus-eating,” I said quietly. “It is an occupation, or I am mistaken, that you would weary of.”

“Do you think that ?” She paused a moment. “Well—God knows !” she cried abruptly. “I should like to think it, too ; but I am not like you. I have no occupation—I have nothing to do.”

"*Make* an occupation, then—if you want one."

"How can I?"

"Go on with your education: I daresay you have plenty to learn. Read; there are more good books to be read than you will ever get through: work at your drawing; if I had your leisure I would make myself an artist: you sing; practise at your music—learn it as a science, if you like—study counterpoint—that will give you work enough."

She had partly risen up; she sat as I spoke bending her head upon her knees: she did not answer me until after some moments. When she did at length speak, changing her attitude and looking up, her tone indicated strong though suppressed feeling.

"Miss Haig, with an object before me I could work day and night! If for some great object I had to reach a special goal, I *would* reach it though the race killed me: but I cannot work steadily without a fixed aim: I cannot spend months and years toiling for no definite return. I want a fixed work: something that I *must* do—something whose success from day to day would be a thing that my well-

being depended on, Miss Haig!" she exclaimed abruptly. "I could almost find it in my heart to envy *you*."

"Is earning one's own bread, then, so noble an object to toil for?" I said—perhaps a little bitterly. "Can you, surrounded as you are by some of God's greatest blessings, find no higher end to desire for your work than that of keeping body and soul together? What do you envy in my life? *I* am not complaining of it—God knows, I have little reason to do so now! but do you think I would be a governess if I could help it? And yet *you*, who are free to despise your liberty—*you* to talk of offering your back for the burden whose long, daily, endless pressure grinds out the very life and spirit from thousands! *Object* do you want? You may have object enough. Take some one thing—let your object be to master it to the utmost of your power: make your own will and sense of right a necessity for working. Fix upon what you please, if only you keep to it; but the higher your aim the better, so that you set to work humbly and with patience. I have told you already what *I* would

do had I your freedom and your advantages. I would make myself an artist: I would throw all the strength I have into that object: I would make my will a law to myself: I would study day after day—month after month—year after year, till my hand should have power to obey my mind; till the thoughts that I conceive, and the images that fill me, should glow as clear upon my canvass as they glow now within my brain.”

Sydney's dark eyes had kindled: her face was turned to me, and their wildly glorious light threw such a gleam of radiance over it, that the whole seemed almost beautiful: she had swept her short curls back, and the bared, broad brow, the eloquent eyes, the mouth with its firm, proud, curled lips, formed together a countenance that would, could its expression have been well seized, have made a striking picture.

“I wanted something to stir me up—*you* have touched me!” she said abruptly: “I wanted a spur—you have given me one that sets my blood leaping!”

“You like it, then?”

“Did not I tell you that I would give five years

of my life even to be able to paint a sketch like like that of yours ? ”

“Do not be so prodigal with the years of your life: keep your five years for studying instead of offering to fling them away; you will have something of a better bargain of them so, I imagine.”

“You take every thing I say literally. Well, never mind! I will be an artist!”

“You are in earnest ? ”

“I will give heart and soul to it: if the power is in me, it shall come out ! ”

“But, consider—the power may be long in coming: you may be cast down a hundred times; you will work to the end of your life, and still see mountain upon mountain piled around you, to whose summit no foot of yours will ever reach.”

She faced me with one of her proud smiles.

“They may reach above the clouds, and I may be a molehill on the earth—but I will try ! ”

“Try, then—you are strong enough, I think.”

She sat with her arms folded round her knees, her head thrown a little back, her whole face—from its flushed cheek to its closed lips—eloquent

of the firmness of her purpose. I was pleased to have put her in this mood ; I liked the traits I had called forth.

“Since you really mean to work,” I said, “you must have a teacher. If, as you say, I draw better than you do now, will you let me assist you for the present ?”

I disturbed her ; she looked round to me with a little uneasiness and embarrassment.

“I should like to take lessons from you very much,” she said, after a moment’s hesitation ; “that is—if you would let me receive them as—as I should from any one else.”

“By paying for them, I suppose ?—that is your condition ? Very well, then, go and seek your lessons elsewhere ; you don’t get them from me upon such terms.”

“But, Miss Haig”—eagerly—“your time is valuable to you. I could not take it up in that way without making you any return ; it would make me most uncomfortable.”

“Miss Wynter, do you imagine that you are the only proud woman at Riverston ? You may do

as you like about this matter—accept my aid or reject it, as you please—but understand, at least, that if *you* are too proud to take it freely, *I* am too proud to be paid for it.”

She turned to me, and, before I was prepared for so swift a response, laid her hand lightly upon mine.

“I beg your pardon—I *will* take it,” she said quickly, almost in a tone of humility.

If I felt pleasure at having bent her to me—and I did—I kept my satisfaction to myself: I merely took her offered hand, and thanked her quietly for her acquiescence.

Her fingers lingered for a moment in my clasp after I had spoken; she looked up to me with great sweetness and feeling.

“Miss Haig,” she said, “forgive me for what I said so thoughtlessly a while ago about envying your life: believe me, if I had not lain on eider-down until I have sickened of it, I should not have had the folly to hanker after a straw pallet.”

“I believe you heartily: but for the future confine your longings to the acquisition of a wholesome

horsehair mattress," I said laughing. "You will find that pleasanter for resting on than either straw or eider-down."

She laughed with me, and our talk ended amicably. It was half-past four o'clock, and full time for us to be wending our way home. I roused my bonnie Effie, and the three of us returned to the house together.

My lessons to Sydney commenced immediately. I found her an excellent pupil. Earnest, determined, persevering, abounding in quiet untiring energy, no teacher could have desired a more docile recipient of her instructions than I found in her. She had very considerable talent, too: her taste was pure, her eye keen and correct, her appreciation of colour especially good, her facility of delicate imitation considerable, her enthusiasm exhaustless. I soon became convinced, in my own mind, that in making painting for the present her chief study, she had chosen wisely.

She spent the principal hours of every morning at her work. Her lesson with me was usually early—before I went to Effie; for the time that I gave

her I liked to devote to her exclusively, sitting beside her and watching her hand constantly ; and at these times she was invariably as gentle, submissive, humble as a child. Our intercourse at other times of the day was not, however, always conducted with a similar velvet mildness. We were together a good deal, and, as we harmonized on some points with about the accordancy of fire and water, our encounters were not always placid ones. Her wrath, however, always amused infinitely more than it angered me ; for, cautious and haughty and intensely reserved as she was beyond a certain point, there was yet always upon the surface such a fresh sunny energy and life in her—such open hearty frankness, such general sweetness and kindliness of nature, that even in her hottest moods her presence was at all times welcome and pleasant to me. Riverston was certainly the brighter for her.

CHAPTER XIV.

NEWS FROM THE NORTH.

THE post-bag was unusually full one morning some weeks after Sydney's return home; there were letters for all of us that day except Helen and Effie. They were distributed to us as we sat round the breakfast table, and we forthwith—not an uncommon habit at Riverston—proceeded to peruse them, leaving poor Effie, for Helen seldom joined us at breakfast, to conclude her meal in silence.

My letter was from my mother. It told me of changes in a long familiar place, amongst old familiar people, and my thoughts had travelled away from Riverston to a far off spot, where from my childhood it had seemed to me that the world and the world's troubles had never pierced—to an

old house, grey with time, mantled with lichen, moss, and ivy—to antique low-roofed rooms, whose every piece of furniture, whose every ornament, to the vase of homely flowers upon the mantelshelf, I knew—to faces that had been around me from my babyhood—ageing in all those years so little through their placid life, that *I* seemed older now in my two-and-twenty summers than *they*: my thoughts, as I said, had travelled far from Riverston, dwelling on the strange news that at last the fiat had gone forth which was to tear the current of this sluggish life into new channels—when my musings were abruptly, for the moment at least, dispelled by an almost simultaneous exclamation that came from Mr. and Mrs. Wynter.

“Rupert is coming to us for a week, my dear,” Mr. Wynter said.

“And *Gilbert* is coming!” Mrs. Wynter cried. “Would you believe it? *Gilbert* has actually made up his mind to come!”

Both Sydney and I raised our eyes as they spoke, but not in the same direction, for she had looked at the speakers—I at her. Both these

announcements I found were received by her with some emotion. At the first her lips were compressed, and a look of annoyance that was almost distress flitted across her face ; at the second this gave place to an expression of half-ludicrous, half-serious dismay, and her lips parted as suddenly as they had closed, with a sort of gasp of half-suppressed amazement. But not a word fell from her, and in the buzz of the others' mutual expressions of pleasure her silence seemed to be unobserved. As for me, not being peculiarly called upon to express either satisfaction or the reverse, I returned to the perusal of my letter.

Half an hour later I was in the school-room, correcting an exercise of Effie's before lessons began, when I was joined by Sydney. She came in and dropped into a chair opposite me without a word. I went on with my work for a few moments, till, wondering at length what she had come for, I looked up. She seemed only waiting to catch my attention.

"I am in despair," she said.

"Indeed ! on what account ? "

"Did not you hear what they were talking about at breakfast?"

"About Mr. Rupert's coming?" I asked.

I do not know if the inquiry hit the truth too nearly, but certainly as I spoke the blood rose to her cheek. It was, however, her only sign of emotion, for her slight laugh was quite unembarrassed; and her tone quite easy and natural as she answered—

"Oh no! that won't throw me into despair. It is Uncle Gilbert's visit I am thinking of. Miss Haig, you know"—she hesitated an instant—"you know about him—do you not?"

"I know a little."

"You know that he is deformed?"

"Yes—what of that?"

I asked the question coolly enough, but Sydney was far from bringing the same calmness to her answer.

"What of that!" she echoed. "Is it nothing to be deformed, do you think?"

"Did I say it was nothing?"

"You spoke in a tone as if it was."

"You mistook the meaning of my tone. I merely wanted to know what his deformity had to do with your excitement concerning his coming."

She rose up without answering me, and going to the window stood there in silence for some moments: when she left it she did not return to the chair she had occupied, but stood, as it was her favourite habit to do, leaning on a corner of the mantelpiece.

"Miss Haig, I hate deformed people!"

"A most reasonable hatred."

"I don't call it reasonable; it is only instinctive."

"You had better get rid of your instinct, then, as fast as you can."

"And you will give me no sympathy?"

"For the instinct, if you like, a little; for the indulgence of it none whatever."

"But I don't indulge it, Miss Haig: I have tried to overcome it, and I cannot. I assure you I have tried hard to get over the feeling I have about Uncle Gilbert."

"Perhaps there is something besides the deformity to get over?"

"I think, if I got over that, I could bear the rest."

"What is 'the rest'?"

"I don't know how to tell you. He frightens me: he is so ill-tempered; he is so miserably suspicious. Do what you will to try and please him, he will never believe but that you have some selfish end of your own to gain by what you do."

"If I were you, I would persevere in my good deeds till I forced him to see that he was in the wrong."

"Ah, yes!—I could do that if I liked him."

"Could you not do it out of compassion for him?"

"He makes no appeal to my compassion. I do not think he wants to be converted."

"Never mind what you *think* he wants; try him."

"I have—as well as I can—but it does no good. I tell you he frightens me, and he shocks me: he neither likes me, nor I him."

"Other people like him: Effie does."

"Yes—Effie is his pet,"—and she gave a suppressed shudder.

"Is he suspicious of her?"

"No, I don't think he is—oh no! unless he was absolutely insane, he could not be."

"Who, besides you, does he suspect, then?"

"He used to suspect Helen—he suspected her horribly. I don't think he ever believed a sentence she said to him—unless when she spoke angrily. Poor Nelly! She did not like him—she was so gay, you know, at that time, and they did not get on well together at all."

"Well—who else?"

"Every stranger he comes near."

"Poor Mr. Kingsley!" I said. I turned round again to my exercise, for it was growing close upon our lesson hour, and continued the correction of it. Sydney did not take her departure, but, gliding back after a few moments to her first seat, took up a piece of Effie's sewing that lay upon the table, and occupied herself with it till my work was ended.

"You seem to have very little to do this morning," I said, as I put the slate away.

"My system has received such a shock that I can't settle down to my usual employments," she said, laughing. "I want to calm myself by the contemplation of your industry."

"You had better summon Effie, then; for my industry is likely to pause now until she makes her appearance."

"I will call her if you like; but, if she comes, I must take my departure, for I shall get no calming influence from *her*. She is more excited than I am myself. Miss Haig, every body in the house is excited more or less this morning, except you."

"How do you know that *I* am an exception?"

"Don't you give every sign of being one?"

"Do you always trust to outward signs?"

"Not always. Do you know," she looked up quickly, "I have been speculating on that very question in regard to you for the last month?"

"Have you? And may I know what conclusion you have come to?"

"Ah! unfortunately, I have not come to a

conclusion at all ; I wish you would help me to one ? ”

“ If I did, you could not assure yourself that it was true.”

She glanced up half-laughing, yet with a keen inquiry in her eye ; then, stooping her head without speaking, drew a book towards her, and began absently turning over its pages. It was one that belonged to me, and my name was written at full on its fly-leaf, “ Honor Sybil Haig.” She came upon that presently, and read it apparently, for the next moment her face was again quickly raised.

“ I did not know that you were called Sybil,” she exclaimed. “ Honor Sybil—who on earth gave you such a conjunction of names ? ”

“ My father and mother, I suppose. What is your objection to them ? ”

“ I don’t object to them, I rather like them ; but is Honor a name in your family ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ And Sybil, too ? ”

“ No.”

“ Ah ! I thought not. And so, when they had

called you Honor out of compliment to somebody or other, they were obliged to tack Sybil on to the end of it, that you might have some shadow of affinity with your name?"

"Does Sybil give me that affinity?"

"Don't you feel that it does? What could you desire more uncanny or weird-like?—more like you in every way? But as for Honor—you are no more like an Honor than a witch is like the cardinal virtues. And yet, I like Honor!" she exclaimed; "I like the two names together, they are quaint and queer and contradictory—exactly what a name for you ought to be—if they would only stop there; for as for that final abomination——"

"Is that your civil designation for my surname?"

"Exactly! That hideous Haig is an absolute distress to me. I hate names without any euphony in them. Why can't you cut off the *g* at the end, and make it Hay? Though, to be sure, it is in a manner like you too, as it is," she added, bluntly.

"You are unusually complimentary to-day," I

said, but she composedly went on without heeding my interruption.

"It is certainly characteristic, ugly as it is. The *g* gives a sort of biting spice to the end of the word that perfectly suits you, for you have exactly the same kind of spice in your own composition (I don't know what sort it is—is is not fiery enough for cayenne pepper); but the sound is hideous—I never say it without thinking of the process of wringing a chicken's neck."

"Well, you had better *not* say it, then," I suggested. "You can call me what Helen does."

"Ah—that is just what I wanted to ask if I might do!" she exclaimed, with a sudden change of voice. "I should like to call you Honor!"

"Very well—do it."

She glanced at me a moment without speaking; then, rising, glided round to the back of my chair, and stooping over it, put her arm across my neck and bent my head upwards.

"Say something more to me than that," she began pleading in the most softly coaxing tone—and Sydney's voice at her bidding could become

singularly musical and sweet. "Don't just say, 'do it'—like a piece of adamant—as if you didn't care a straw for what I call you."

"Suppose I don't?"

"I *won't* suppose it! Every body cares what they are called. I care very much what *you* call me; you called me Sydney last night, and I felt quite grateful to you."

"Did I never call you Sydney until last night?"

"Never—to myself."

"And you want me to do it?"

"I want you to do it."

"Very well—I will. And I want you to call me Honor. Is that polite enough?"

"I don't want politeness," quickly.

"What, then?"

She stooped lower down, leaning one arm upon my shoulder till her cheek touched mine.

"Give me a kiss, and you may keep all your politeness to yourself; I don't like such an unnatural commodity in you," she said, half laughing.

"There, then—I give you one—two—three kisses. Now, be content and get away."

"Did you kiss me to get rid of me?"

"Are you going to turn as suspicious as your Uncle Gilbert?"

"No, I am not suspicious a bit; only tell me what I am to go for?"

"Because I want Effie."

"But she is not here."

"You may go and hunt her out for me, then."

"Miss Haig, you won't tell any body what I said about Uncle Gilbert?"

"I don't think it is worth repeating."

"Would you repeat it if you did."

"Go and find Effie."

"Honor,"—coming quite back to the table—"I get into a habit of saying things to you that I never say to any body else:—is it a bad habit, do you think?"

"Very."

"Why?" quickly. "No, no—you don't think so!" half laughing.

"I do: it is very dangerous."

"Not with you."

"And why not with me?"

"Because I don't believe you would betray any body."

"Very well : it is not my interest to contradict you. Go and call Effie."

"You want me away—really ?"

"I want you away—most decidedly."

"Well, I am going," and she got the length of the door. "Honor," she turned round once more—"is she not a dear pet ?"

"Effie ?—yes, far the best amongst you. Now be off with you, or I shall turn you out."

Gilbert Kingsley was Mr. Wynter's half-brother—the son of his mother by a second marriage. This marriage had produced three children—Mrs. Ramsay, or, as her maiden name had been, Grace Kingsley—Gilbert—and another sister who lived with him, the youngest of the three, Ursula.

Gilbert Kingsley, as I heard, had been deformed from his birth. It was not a deformity that unfitted him for moving about amongst men : he had the free use of all his members, but nature had imposed a hump upon his back, and placed a head upon his shoulders seriously out of proportion with

the remainder of his body. The face belonging to this mis-sized head was also, according to Sydney's assurance, exceedingly unprepossessing—wild, fierce, and dusky: dark as night at ordinary times, but when stirred by any passion or emotion, gleaming out into strange flushings of sudden light, fire-blaze of lightning, or—but far more rarely—soft, star-beaming radiance.

He and his youngest sister lived together. He had rather a valuable estate on the east border of the great coal-field of South Yorkshire, and a pit was worked upon his property; but the place itself was desolate and bleak, bare of wood, wild, cheerless, uncultivated.

"Unless you could see it, Honor," Sydney told me, "I doubt if you could possibly conceive any thing so terribly depressing as the place is."

"How does it suit your Uncle?" I inquired.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I never asked him: we are not accustomed to be confidential together: I know about as much of what the *coals* think of the place as of what he does. He goes wandering about amongst his

grimy colliers from morning till night, scarcely noticing or speaking a word to another human being—and what he thinks of all the time, heaven knows! They are not very merry thoughts, or he would hardly have the look upon his face that he has, I suppose. But what could you expect, Honor, when he never associates with any one but those rough, half-humanized colliers from one year's end to another? There is no society in the place: all the time I was there, I never saw him speak to a gentleman except the clergyman; and, as for Aunt Ursula, I don't suppose he and she have two ideas in common. Oh, Honor, it is a mournful kind of life! I would rather be free of mine altogether than lead such a one!"

Her account might be exaggerated, but yet the sketch she drew of that barren, stunted, joyless existence—so dreary, monotonous, lonely—impressed itself vividly on my mind: I pictured to myself the waste, bleak, unbeautiful country, with its strange, savage, underground population of rude, begrimed workers: I imaged the unresting, misshapen figure wandering through the midst of them, with his

unspoken thoughts, and his now quenched, now kindling eyes: I painted to myself the homeless house to which he returned at nightfall, the companionless sister, the friendless hearth; and *my* soul, too, shrank up before such a phantasmagory of a life.

Had it by possibility any attraction for Mr. Kingsley? any peculiar rude or wild charm that knit him to it? It was hard to get him to leave it—that I knew: necessity and not free choice was the only thing that drew him from it now. A month ago he had caught a virulent fever that had attacked some families amongst his work-people, and he was ordered, for his convalescence it seemed was slow, to leave his choked and impure northern air for a milder climate. Yet he had not yielded to his fate even now without a struggle: he would still have remained at home and braved both fever and physician, had not a new force in the form of his sister arisen at length to oppose him. The fever was still amongst the people: she had no desire to run more risk of catching it, she said: let him go to Riverston, she would go to some relations further north: the house might be shut up until they

both returned. Thus it was settled—"though he was very reluctant," so Miss Ursula wrote. But could it have been affection for that dreary home that made it so hard to wring an assent to quitting it from him?

"What day do you expect him?" I asked Mrs. Wynter.

"Ursula says the 9th or 10th, dear."

"And Mr. Rupert?"

"Oh! he will come in the beginning of the week—I think upon Tuesday."

It was Friday now, the 4th of June.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BEGINNING OF A CONTEST.

I WAS in the drawing-room on Tuesday morning, searching for some article that I wanted, when a gentleman, a stranger to me, was ushered in. He believed Miss Wynter was at home, he said with a bow as he perceived me. I believed she was, I replied, and, having found what I was seeking for, I took my leave, and returned to the school-room whence I had descended.

Half an hour afterwards Effie, as she sat learning a lesson in the window-seat, broke suddenly out with an exclamation and a request—

“There is Sydney and some body going into the garden! Miss Haig, may I go and see who it is? Oh yes! she wants me—she is beckoning! May I go, please?”

“You may go if you like, you little piece of curiosity; only, recollect that lesson must be known by to-morrow.”

“Oh yes!”—and in hot haste away she stowed books and slate, and made her escape.

The trio did not return indoors until half an hour past luncheon time. They had been a long way round the grounds: the day was so fine, and Riverston, the stranger said civilly, boasted so many beauties that every turn tempted one further. He only hoped his enthusiasm had not caused too much fatigue to Miss Wynter.

No one to see Sydney as he spoke would have accused her of being fatigued; so bright and fresh I had scarcely yet seen her. Her dark eyes were kindled, her usually sallow cheek glowing: as she came in, talking with animation, her lips smiling, and her short curls blown into rather a graceful disorder, she looked almost pretty.

I had not long to wonder who this gentleman might be whose presence seemed to be so pleasant a cordial to her. His name was Leslie, I was told: Sydney had been acquainted with him in

Edinburgh; since they had met there he had been in London, and was now, it seemed, at Hastings, in capacity of nurse, according to his own declaration, to an invalid or hypochondriac uncle there. He had been too delighted to find himself within so short a distance of Riverston, he told us, to be able to resist the temptation of renewing his acquaintance with Miss Wynter.

This was what I gathered respecting him from Sydney and himself: my own observation carried me a little further. This showed me, in the first place, that Mr. Leslie was a man of very striking appearance—tall, well made, handsome: the figure slight yet muscular, the face a little bronzed, and chiselled with great clearness and regularity, the head adorned with a thick mass of closely-curling chestnut hair. In my lifetime I have seen few men so handsome; and yet, comparing him with others of his own kind—with Mr. Rupert for instance, as I did—for I had by degrees grown accustomed to consider Mr. Rupert somewhat as a standard of measurement for other men—he did not altogether please me. True, the face was singu-

larly finely cut, the features strong even while delicate, the brow well built, the eyes brilliant and rich-coloured, the entire face quite devoid of any tincture of effeminacy ; moreover, both mouth and eyes wore a pleasant smile to-day, open, cordial, courteous—a smile that sat well on his handsome lips ; but with all he yet failed to stand well when I arraigned him by Mr. Rupert's side. In my eyes the one was to the other what a shallow river is to a wide sea—beautiful, sunny, pleasant on the surface, but giving to the diver, instead of gemmed bed or soundless depth, a little, deceptive, sparkling sand.

His manner was easy and animated ; in conversation he was to my mind a little too much given to courtly speeches ; he dealt out his courteous compliments in doses rather larger than I cared to swallow ; yet I confess that he talked agreeably and well, and he bestowed some portion of his attention in turn upon all of us, though a Benjamin's portion, I quickly perceived, fell to Sydney's share. It was, I noticed, an amount greater than the simple fact of former acquaintanceship could have made

necessary ; it amounted to a degree of deferential gallantry—it was marked, unmistakeable.

Was Sydney conscious of it ? Did her interpretation of it pair with mine ? I watched her closely : she was in excellent spirits—in excellent temper : she was pleased and animated, her eyes sparkled and her cheek glowed ; yet she baffled me ; I could not read her. Through all her animation, in spite of the evidences of high spirits that I saw in her, there was yet a show of composure and self-possession—a quiet, undemonstrative manner of accepting Mr. Leslie's attentions, such as seemed scarcely to betoken either depth of feeling in her, or a consciousness of deep feeling in him. But I might be wrong. Sydney's reserve was made of wonderfully impenetrable stuff : she could suppress emotion at times with inimitable *sang-froid*, and act a part, when it pleased her to do so, better than most women I have ever known.

Mr. Leslie remained to luncheon, and, mutually pleased as each one of our small party seemed with the other, the afternoon was lengthening ere he took his leave ; nor, even when we had at length

risen to bid him farewell, were our adieux allowed at once to proceed, for, as we stood up, we were interrupted by the arrival, at that moment unlooked for—of Mr. Rupert. Not a sound had we heard beforehand of his approach: neither carriage roll nor horse's tread had warned us of his vicinity: the drawing-room door was opened, and he stood smiling his good-morrow on the threshold ere one of us within knew that a step had entered the hall.

I had looked forward to this moment: my eye now, passing the others, caught Sydney and fixed itself on her: my ear grew awake to catch her welcome. How would she meet him?—how look on him? Alas! both ear and eye gained a starved meal. Not a step did she move, not a glance did she give him: coolly and coldly, as she might have greeted the most indifferent acquaintance, did she extend her hand to him as he advanced to her; glibly, without an instant's faltering or hesitation, were the chill words of her welcome spoken.

“Good-morning. We scarcely expected to see you so soon,” she said.

"You forgot that I should come by rail, I suppose?—How are you? You are looking very well," he said cordially.

"I am quite well, thank you."

She drew her hand from his coldly, and turned away. There was neither confusion in her, nor the least appearance of discomfiture in him: his lips, as he came to her, had been clothed with an unconcealed smile of pleasure, which survived the coldness of her reception, and beamed as brightly upon me when he turned from her as though her chill welcome had borne no shadow of repulse.

"That is an Edinburgh friend of Sydney's," Mrs. Wynter explained, as the door at length closed upon Mr. Leslie.

"Indeed! I never met him in Edinburgh," Mr. Rupert said.

"He was not there when you were," Sydney interposed. "He does not live there: he is not an Edinburgh man at all."

"Is he not, dear? But he is Scotch, at any rate. Leslie is such a very Scotch name."

"What did you say the name is—Leslie?"

and Mr. Rupert turned to Mrs. Wynter with an eagerness of tone and look that struck me with surprise ; but in her his excitement seemed abruptly to awake something of a similar emotion, for, raising to him a glance of quick and startled uneasiness, she answered hurriedly—

“Yes, Leslie—but I never thought—oh ! you know there are so many Leslies,” she said.

“Yes,”—and I thought that, in order to negative his former eagerness, he made his tone purposely careless now—“yes, certainly, the name is common enough in Scotland.”

He was turning away, but she spoke again—

“I asked him to dinner on Thursday,” she said half-deprecatingly.

“Did you ?” and the same look of interest flashed a second time into his face. Neither of them, however, spoke again. She left the room almost immediately : he, after a few moments’ somewhat grave silence, quietly turned to where Sydney was seated, and took his station at her side, a little in her rear—a position, I took notice, whence he could see her face better than she could his.

"How did you come from Edinburgh?" he inquired abruptly.

"By sea."

"What! are you not reconciled to railways yet?"

"I don't like long journeys by railway."

"Yet it is the least fatiguing mode of travelling."

"Not to me. The sea and I are very good friends."

"So I remember," he said.

It was a remark spoken very quietly, but for some reason known to herself it brought a flush, with which I guessed she was little enough pleased, to her cheek. It evidently aroused some recollection in her at whose power to force her to the betrayal of emotion her quick pride was stung; for, with a tone of mingled irritation and defiance—angry, I could see, both with herself and him—she answered quickly—

"You are thinking of my boasting that morning on the Forth, when we played hero and heroine, and planned magnificent voyages—a

grand scheme of castle-building on the sea!"—and she laughed scornfully.

"Yes, I was thinking of that morning. And, if I recollect aright, your heroine's part was to be as easy as well as a picturesque one—was it not?" he asked gaily. "There was something in the plan about a couch of velvet cushions, on which you were to lie and drink in the sea breezes; while I, as hero——"

"I have given up velvet cushions, Mr. Rupert," she interrupted, with an impatience which I more than suspected she betrayed unwillingly: "Miss Haig has provided me lately with a horsehair mattress, which I find suits me admirably: possibly, if I feel that too luxurious, I shall resort to a straw pallet. It is wisest, I have learned, to make our bed hard with our own hands before others begin to throw stones into it."

She was in a strange, bitter, reckless humour; I did not understand her: I do not know if Mr. Rupert did; I found it difficult to read what were his thoughts. He stood leaning a little over the high back of her chair, his bright grey eye keeping

a keen watch upon her face, taking in her mood apparently, yet letting no sign of what he thought of it escape him, except that only at her last words a slight smile, that vanished before its interpretation grew clear to me, curled his lips. But he made no reply to her.

“Do you remember,” he asked her after some seconds, “the last time that we were together in this room ?”

I thought the moment strangely ill-selected for such an inquiry; but he knew her and his own reasons for questioning her better than I did. She was clearly, however, not in a melting mood to-day, and what he asked, I could see, vexed her, though she answered it—for she was honest and straightforward in all things—without an attempt to prevaricate.

“Yes,” she said, after a moment; “you mean when I was a child, the night before you went to Italy: I remember it perfectly.”

There was no softness in her tone; she might have liked him in those old days; I believe she did; but the recollection of them wakened no

visible emotion in her ; quietly and coldly she gave her answer and was silent.

“What a glorious evening it was ! What a shower of sunshine had been pouring all the afternoon through that bay window there ! Do you remember how it stood open all the evening, and the breeze brought the scent of the honeysuckle into the room ? I was sorry to find that honeysuckle-tree cut down when I came back.”

“There are times now,” Sydney had said to me one day, “when I can scarcely bear the perfume of honeysuckle ; I had once such associations connected with it.”

I looked at her as Mr. Rupert spoke, and there was a quiver passing over her cold lip ; its lingering tremor was on her voice too when she spoke, careless as she sought to make its tone.

“Some disease got into the bark, I believe ; they hoped at first that it would grow up again, but I suppose the root is dead now.”

“They had better perhaps have let it remain standing.”

"I don't think so: better to root it out altogether than to leave its dead tendrils hanging where the green leaves used to be."

There was a singular and sudden energy in her tone as she spoke the last words, that made me suspect something more than the destruction of honeysuckle-trees to be in her thoughts. He apprehended her meaning probably; for, though his reply was simple enough, it too had its peculiar tone.

"I doubt whether the old root is really dead," he said; "before I go, I will see if I can find it."

She made no answer; it was he again who recommenced their talk—harping still upon the same string.

"How did they let you sit up so long that night? Midsummer eve though it was, we talked for more than an hour in the twilight—did we not?—before they called you away. Do you remember how very warm it was? how you shook back all your hair—you wore long curls then—and made a pillow for your head on the window-sill, and lay

there looking up to the stars, and teaching me certain ones to—— ”

She interrupted him suddenly before his sentence closed. There was a flush upon her cheek as she spoke, but it was of anger, not of any softer emotion, and her voice, lowered though it was almost to a whisper, betrayed unmistakeably the irritation that she could not suppress.

“ Mr. Rupert,” she said, “ you need not go over each separate item of the account ; I remember that night—but you had better select some other subject to converse upon ; it can be no satisfaction to either of us to recall it now.”

He received her haughty repulse with perfect composure ; lowering his voice into unison with her’s, he only put the question to her gravely—

“ Why can it not ? ”

“ Because we were friends then ! ” she answered, with bitter though suppressed vehemence. She scarcely spoke above her breath, yet the hiss of her words reached me clearly.

“ And now ? Have you not forgotten yet ? ”

“ Is it a thing to forget ? ” she asked fiercely,

yet still in the same suppressed tone. "No; I have not forgotten—and I never will, while I live!"

"Sydney!" he said.

His tone was meant to quell her; rather, I thought, its accent of authority would have roused her, for authoritative, and neither tender nor supplicatory, was it; but, whatever her inward state of feeling might have been, outwardly she did not resent it. With a hasty movement she only rose up from her seat, and, moving a few steps aside, rested her arm on the mantel-shelf, standing there for several minutes afterwards as motionless and undemonstrative as stone; standing there, indeed, until Mr. Rupert chose to leave the room, and she and I were left together as its only occupants. Then presently she came noiselessly towards me, where I sat in that bay window, to which Mr. Rupert had lately made such unacceptable reference.

"I wish one could be a child all one's life long, Honor," she said abruptly, in a queer tone, half plaintive, half angry; and, waiting no response,

down she sank upon a stool at my feet, and turning her face laid it on my knees.

I said nothing to her. I knew her reserve too well to make the smallest attempt to force her confidence: I knew that she wanted neither to talk nor to be questioned: I let her remain in perfect silence, showing my consciousness of her proximity only by once or twice touching her hair, and after ten minutes she looked up with the traces of tears, which she was alike too proud to speak of, and too proud to hide, upon her cheek. She rose from her low seat with something between a sob and a laugh, and put her arm round my neck.

“Give me a kiss, Honor.”

Then, while I kissed her, still between jest and earnest—

“It is a hard, cruel, unkind world: if any body said any thing bad about you, Honor, I would fight them for it. I wonder if any one would do as much for me! Heigh ho! I wish you would come out Honor: I feel stifled with the hot air of this room That is four o’clock striking: come out for half

an hour before dinner, and give me another kiss first—I like to be kissed—it is comforting. Yes—thank you: now, come away.”

And, linking her arm in mine, we went.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SUMMER EVENING.

"When does your uncle come?"

"To-morrow, I believe. We expect to hear certainly in the morning."

It was after dinner, and Sydney sat sketching in the bow window. She did not often paint in the evenings, but I had suggested that she should attempt the portrayal of some sunset colours, and, as the sky gave promise of a warm glow this evening, she had brought her drawing materials downstairs, and was now at work on a group of elm-trees, whose green wreathed branches were deep-dyed with the splendour of a red declining sun.

"It is eleven years since I have seen him," Mr. Rupert said. "I shall be heartily glad to meet him again."

No response from Sydney : to *her* mind gladness at seeing Mr. Kingsley was an idea hard to be entertained.

"He will hardly recognize me, I suppose. These years must have made much more change in me than in him.

"I don't believe they have made the least change in him : as far back as I can remember, he has always been the same : he never seems to me to grow one year older or younger."

"Yes—I suppose *you* can remember little change in him ; but to *my* mind two very different pictures are presented when I call up the image of Mr. Kingsley as he was at my first and last meeting with him."

I felt an inclination to ask in what this difference lay ; but it struck me that my question might be an intermeddling in what I had no business with, and I therefore held my tongue. I was rewarded presently for my self-denial.

"I suppose he was quite a young man when you first saw him," Sydney said.

"Yes—he was not more than three or four and

twenty. It was before that cruel blow fell upon him."

Sydney's head started up—her eyes full of broad amazement.

"What blow? What do you mean?"

"I thought you knew that story."

"I know *no* story. Tell me."

"I cannot tell you much. I only know that he was attached to a girl who behaved very heartlessly to him."

"Uncle Gilbert!" she cried.

He went on, taking little notice of her surprise.

"It was a shameful business from the beginning, I believe. The woman did all in her power to entangle him—she gave him every possible encouragement, and then made a jest of the whole affair. They say it nearly drove him mad."

"How *could* any woman pretend to love him?" and Sydney shuddered.

"Yes—it was a most heartlessly cruel thing."

I smiled at Mr. Rupert's misconception: it was not the cruelty in this case that was shocking Sydney—that was by no means her foremost

thought ; with her, I saw clearly, the first impulse was simply horror that any woman could feign love for a being so unlovely : indignation at the wrong done was altogether a secondary feeling. Yet as a secondary feeling it *did* arise.

"The thought of such women always makes my blood stir. I should like to know what became of that one."

"I never heard. She would marry some one, no doubt. She was very beautiful."

Another pause.

"And it was before this happened that you saw him first ?"

"Before he made the discovery—yes. He came here for a single day ; and it is strange that at that first sight of him I scarcely recollect his deformity making almost any impression upon me."

"How old were you ?"

"A mere child : nine or ten, probably."

"Then by the time I can remember, it was all over ?"

"It was over within two months from that time."

"Mr. Rupert"—presently—"was he like other people then?—when you first saw him, I mean?"

"If he was unlike it was only in appearing lighter-hearted. He seemed to me to carry sunshine about with him. He had in those days one of the most full, hearty, genial laughs that I ever remember to have heard."

"Strange! And how long passed before you saw him next?"

"Two years or so. Give me that brush," Mr. Rupert demanded suddenly; "you are making a singular daub of those trees."

She raised her head with a quick movement, and a look shone in her dark eyes that plainly denoted a somewhat haughty surprise at his interference; but a moment afterwards the brush had left her fingers for his, and her drawing-board had assumed a position that brought it far more beneath his hand than her own. Rapidly pointing out a few principal errors that she had committed, he quietly set himself—he had drawn a seat beside her—without a word of apology, to alter or to improve, she meanwhile, in passive and I thought sullen

silence, retaining her seat without either a movement or a gesture, except, as I noticed, a half visible pressure of her teeth upon her under lip—a sign sufficient, however, to me, as I sat watching her, to denote that some feeling not of the most amiable or submissive kind was at work within her.

I looked on in some surprise. The remedy for what she disapproved seemed to me very simple: I waited, momentarily expecting to hear her request the restoration of her implements; but no such requisition came from her: doggedly still she sat for full five minutes, and when at length her words came, unmistakeably irritated as was their tone, all that they conveyed was simply a suggestion.

“ You had better stop—the sun is quite set. It is too late to do any more good with it now.”

“ Presently,” and motioning her hand back as she advanced it, without even looking up, he continued his work, accompanying it as at first with a running comment on her failings.

Not a word more spoke she. For ten minutes did she sit motionless, angry I believe alike with

herself and him, yet making no single further sign of resistance. She sat forwards, leaning her elbow on the table, and her brow upon her hand, never raising her head, but silently with her eyes following the movements of his pencil, watching the process which was changing her faulty sketch into a clear and vigorous delineation—for I examined it on the following day, and saw evidence upon it of a hand stronger and firmer than hers—with an expression of cold impassiveness that covered whatever keener feeling there might lie beneath.

As the light began to fade, he at length leant back and pushed the board from him.

“It is too late to make much of it: you began badly. However, you have made a great advance in drawing lately. Who has been teaching you?”

“Miss Haig.”

“I compliment Miss Haig upon her pupil, then,” and he sent a bright look over upon me. It was one of a kind that I knew and liked well—not altogether a smile, for the eyes only spoke, yet warm, genial, cordial, as though lips and eyes had both been eloquent.

"Sydney has worked well," I said. "She must show you something better than this feeble attempt of to-night; you must not judge her by this."

Sydney rose up suddenly.

"Honor, do you know where they all are? Effie did not go with papa, did she?"

"No, I saw her five minutes ago: she is out of doors somewhere."

Without another word Sydney turned and left us: half a minute afterwards we heard her foot-step on the gravel beneath the window. I rose up and looked after her.

"What a warm sky the sun has left! The evening looks pleasant."

"Very: will you come out?"

"I was going to propose that we should: I grudge any part of a June evening indoors."

I thought when we gained the open air that Mr. Rupert would have hastened to fall into Sydney's track, but, so far from this, I found him more inclined to linger than myself; again and again he paused to call attention to the sky, the trees, the stars, the various spectacles that the summer

evening was creating or beautifying, and when ten minutes had passed we were still not in sight of Sydney. But at last his admiration of nature abruptly ceased: turning to me after a few moments' silence he asked me suddenly—

“What do you think of Helen? How is she?”

“She is as she will probably always be now. Hers is the calm that lives with the signs of wreck and tempest around it.”

“Poor girl! And you think this state will last?”

“I think that it will—except that in some the genius for forgetting is very strong.”

“Not in her, I think. From what I have seen, I should rather dread that her memory might be too intense.”

“It seems to me,” I said, “that this grief of Helen’s has deepened her whole nature. I did not give her credit, when I knew her first, for possessing such power of suffering as she has shown. I thought, pampered as she was, that she would have striven to thrust the bitter draught away from her lips—that she was far likelier to have

sought for forgetfulness in dissipation than for strength in endurance."

"You did her injustice."

"I did. She has shown me that my first judgment was a harsh one. Yet some harshness she did deserve, Mr. Rupert."

"She must have done so, or she would not be suffering now. Their meeting must have been a shock to Sydney."

The words were rather a remark than a question; but, as he spoke, his eyes turned a quick and keen side glance of inquiry on my face. I laughed inwardly at the sight of it. "So," methought, "I perceive your cue, Mr. Rupert."

"Yes," I answered aloud, "of necessity it was. I think she was hardly prepared for finding her so greatly altered. But she is tolerably accustomed to the change now; in fact, she can bear a shock: she has no want of elasticity in her. I should imagine, too," I subjoined—for I thought within myself, I will be even with you, Mr. Rupert: if we talk about Sydney it shall not be solely for *your* gratification:—"I should imagine, too, that

she moulded herself quickly to new conditions: she is flexible."

"You think so?"

He asked the question with a swift scrutiny of eye; I saw his object was to extract my opinions rather than to express his own. But simply to satisfy him by no means suited me.

"Do *you* not?"

He faltered a moment: he was not prepared apparently to give a direct reply; I had no intention however of letting him off: I repeated my question.

"I am hardly a fit judge," he said at length; "since she was a child I have seen little of her."

"And in childhood how did you find her?"

"Not generally flexible, I think. She had decided opinions and a strong will: it was not every hand that could bend her."

"If I thought it was every hand that could bend her now, I should not call her flexible, but weak. However, when I used the word it was scarcely of her strength of will I was thinking: it was of her

general power of growing into harmony with new states of being that I spoke."

"Hm—m!—is she flexible in that way?"

"I have thought so. She certainly fell into the life that she at present leads with scarcely a visible throes of transition: there was no period of unsettlement: two days after her return from Edinburgh, she was as full of quiet home business as though she had never been away from Riverston, or had come back and found no change in it."

"She would have felt the void of want of intercourse with Helen more if it had not been for you. You are a good deal together?"

"A good deal. Yes, she makes a sort of occupation out of me: she has got a few odd fancies in her head concerning me, and pleases herself with spending her spare time in working them out."

A quick speculating glance queried whether I spoke in jest or earnest; but, as my face probably failed equally with my tone to enlighten him, his scrutiny ended in a spoken question.

"What do you mean? What fancies?"

"That is information I withhold," I said laugh-

ing. "They are too uncomplimentary for me to declare them."

"Then I must ask information from Sydney?"

"You are welcome. But I have faith in her: she would abuse me to no second person so harshly as she does to myself."

"Does Sydney find more fault with her friends before their faces than she thinks would be truth to say of them behind their backs?"

Was that a theory propounded to give consolation to himself, I speculated? I would try him.

"I do not know: Sydney is honest," I replied: "if she says less behind her friends' backs than to their faces, it is more from tenderness perhaps than a fear of overleaping the truth."

Did he look dejected? I glanced stealthily upwards. Not he! More serene never man looked. My arrow seemed to have had but a blunted point.

"Yes, honest she has always been: from her earliest years that was one of her characteristics. I would trust Sydney to speak the truth where it was required before most other women!"

He was growing complimentary to *one* of us, at any rate: I, however, as a fractional portion of that lot and parcel, civilly referred to as "most other women," gave a slightly dry cough: I could have had two words to say respecting that dogmatic praise of Sydney's honesty. But Mr. Rupert's enthusiasm was clearly mounting: my humble token of dissent was suffered to pass unnoticed. Flinging his preliminary reserve away with a gesture of royal frankness—he felt emulous, doubtless, to imitate this admirable honesty of Sydney's—he forthwith broke into a scarcely suppressed eulogy concerning her—her talents, her sweetness (he did not experience much of it, I thought)—her warm affections—and various other virtues which he held her to possess.

"It is a character," so he told me, "which repays the time spent in studying it. She is not highly educated: you will have found, I daresay, that she is ignorant enough on many points, but wherever you penetrate her you come on vigorous intellect. With the powers of mind and the faculty of perseverance that she possesses, there are

few things that she might attempt to do in which she would fail."

"Yes—her capacity is fair enough, and, as you say, she has perseverance. She sticks to her painting, though I do my best to discourage her. She keeps her temper too, so that her steadiness probably does not arise from obstinacy."

Our conversation was growing too sweet, I fancied; a little acidity, it seemed to me, would temper it pleasantly. Mr. Rupert's palate, however, appeared to reject that ingredient.

"From obstinacy—no—she has too much good sense for that. I believe that her perseverance in painting evinces some degree of real taste for art: even that sketch she was attempting to-night—faulty as it was, I assure you, Miss Haig, it displayed a feeling for her subject that surprised me."

"It did not surprise me in the least," I answered drily. "It was an excessively bad sketch. I should have recommended her thrusting it in the fire, had you not been good-natured enough to put a few touches to it."

"Well, certainly in itself it was poor enough ; yet it gave promise. But I see you are a severe mistress, Miss Haig !" and he turned the sunshine of his bright glance upon me.

"Not more severe than Sydney needs. She would not do with one who could not hold the reins over her."

"They may be held over her, but not drawn too tightly."

"She must feel them. For my part, while I pretend to have authority over her, I like to keep the bit in her mouth—and to touch her too at times with whip and spur."

"Is she submissive?"

"What is your own experience, Mr. Rupert?"

"Mine?" and he laughed lightly, though to my watching eyes an instant's glance of consciousness betrayed him. "What experience can *I* have? I pretend to no authority over her."

"I thought your experience might have dated from much further back than mine. So far as mine goes, I should say that she submits whenever she finds that resistance will end in conquest.

Make the hand strong enough, and the struggle with her will never be long."

"And when she is conquered—what colour does her mood take?"

"That depends upon who conquers her: with me she is seldom very vicious: perhaps my strength is too little beyond her own to vex her much."

"May it not rather be that her love for you keeps her from taking offence?"

"Her love, Mr. Rupert? I assure you Sydney's love for me is very problematical. No—we get on together; but as for the love that there is between us, I would not answer for it."

"Do *you* profess no affection for her?" he asked quickly.

"Professions of affection are not greatly in my way. No! as far as I can recollect, I have never professed any love for Sydney."

He half smiled at the indirectness of my answer, but there came no immediate reply. When at length, however, he spoke, it was clear that his mind had caught up the delusion that I was in a woful state of ignorance and darkness con-

cerning Sydney's character ; for, in an accent of anxious and earnest persuasion, this was how he proceeded to speak to me :—

“ You must not think that she is cold-hearted, Miss Haig,” he began ; “ you may think you know her better than I do now, but in warmth of heart people do not change with their years, and I can give you my testimony of what she was when she was a child. I have never known man or woman with warmer affections than she had ; I have never known a child so unselfish and self-sacrificing as she was. She has faults,” he admitted this grudgingly, “ but they spring from the generous warmth of her nature. They are faults of temper or of judgment—never of heart. I have known Sydney often in the wrong, but never have I known her do or say an ungenerous or an unkind thing.”

“ Pretty well !” I thought, with an inward laugh, as the conversation of the afternoon rose to my mind. “ A most truthful eulogium we are having ! Let me see what will come next ;” and I waited expectant. “ Will he need a fillip from me to lead him on ?” I questioned with myself.

Not he: I might have been a born mute for any notice my silence got from him.

“ There is so much genuine sweetness of nature in her,” he recommenced again ; “ so much gentleness and patience, too ; so much generous, almost chivalrous feeling. She is one who would stand—who *has* stood—by a friend’s side, alike through good report and evil report, with a fullness of faith that would neither know hesitation nor doubt. Flexible you called her, Miss Haig,” and suddenly he looked down on me, with a singularly irrepressible smile curling his lips ; “ on some points you would scarcely think her flexible. I have known occasions on which arguments and persuasions alike have fallen on Sydney’s ears with as little effect as rain-drops upon glass. Believe me, where she wills it, and especially where her affections prompt her, she is both resolute and proud. Have you never found her so ? ”

“ Oh ! I have found her wilful enough ; and I can imagine her, as you say, very unreasonable when she has got some crotchet in her head. As for her pride, that is not to be gainsaid. I con-

sider it indeed as a many-headed monster; its ugly horns protrude themselves in a dozen different directions."

"A woman is the better for a little pride: Sydney would lose a portion of her piquancy if she lost hers."

"Is Sydney piquant?"

I essayed to give my question a tone of innocent inquiry, but I half fear it failed to deceive. There was a laughing glimmer of light in Mr. Rupert's eyes as they shot out their side glance at me, that spoke a keener consciousness of my inner thoughts than I altogether cared to see. I had no mind to let him get the better of me: very demurely ignoring all perception of his amusement, I subjoined—

"It is a dangerous gift—that of piquancy. Women who possess it always run the risk of becoming coquettes. And, by the way, I have noticed a tendency to coquetry in Sydney more than once: if she had been pretty, I dare say she would have been as bad as Helen."

His eyes asked, "What have you seen?" but

incredulity and happy composure sat still on his unclosed lips. I did not choose to answer any question put to me in that ambiguous fashion ; quietly walking on, I gathered a rose, and fixed it in my waistband, and, when this was done, seeing, I suppose, that no words were likely to come from me, he at length condescended to put his meaning into words.

“ Sydney’s good heart would never suffer her to become a coquette,” he said, with a little not altogether un-anxious gravity : “ but even an appearance of coquetry should be guarded against. I would hardly say that that is a fault Sydney is likely to fall into ; but if Miss Haig has seen more clearly than I ”—and that side glance, that he could make at times eloquent enough, fell keenly and swiftly on me—“ I think that womanly kindness might prompt her to give warning and advice.”

“ Do not distress yourself, Mr. Rupert. Whether the moving power be or be not womanly kindness, advice at least, and plenty of it, Sydney gets from me. I rate her soundly, I assure you : her faults will never lie upon *my* conscience.”

"Are you so hard with her? And how does she take your rating?"—laughing now.

"According to her mood: sometimes with gentleness, oftener she gets abusive in turn. Mr. Rupert, do you observe how that star is glowing now? I wonder who named it Venus; it should rather have been called Juno, that it might mate with Jupiter, and so gain its lawful title of Queen of Heaven."

"It would be worthy of it. It is wonderfully beautiful to-night. How it lights up that soft amber sky! never were gold or diamond more brilliant."

I had brought him back to the stars purposely; for a slight sound that my ears had caught had given me warning that some other life beyond our own was stirring within no great distance of where we stood: soon the eye as well as the ear caught signs.

"Sydney has been up the hill," I said; "that wild pupil of mine takes no delight in a walk on level ground. Well, Effie," for they were already close at hand. "what has been your last exploit?"

how many adventures have you had since we parted last ? ”

“ We went up the hill, and there was a rabbit in amongst the trees, and I nearly got my hand upon it, only Sydney came and frightened it when I was quite close,” Effie reported, with very eloquent changes of tone and look.

“ You untruthful puss, you frightened it yourself ! You don’t know how to walk softly. Honor is the one amongst us who ought to be set to catch rabbits : she can move like a cat. Do you think steps are characteristic, Honor ? ”

“ Very.”

“ What does yours denote, then ? ”

“ Cunning, I suppose, if it resembles cats : will that suit you ? ”

“ I don’t know,” slowly—“ no, I don’t think it will ”—hesitating ; “ no, it won’t, Honor ! ”—with sudden repentant warmth ; and then swiftly she had her arm about my shoulder, and the sentence ended—as many similar sentences with her did—in a sudden, close, vehement kiss upon my cheek, such as had many a time before now nearly lost me

my balance; the extreme vigour of these salutes, added to their abruptness, making their infliction no slight shock upon a frame not very sturdily built.

As I recovered from this one, I perceived that Mr. Rupert was observing us—observing Sydney, I should rather say—with a gusto of expression that a good deal tickled me. “How graceful she is! how gentle, tender, womanly!” thus I could imagine him to be inwardly declaiming; but his spoken words, I am forced to confess, when they at length were uttered, were by no means of this tender sort.

“You will catch cold if you stand still here, with nothing on your shoulders, after running down the hill,” was his sole remark. “If you want to be out longer send Effie in for a shawl,” and he turned round as though to return towards the house.

“Yes,” I said, for Sydney took no notice of his suggestion; “you will be catching cold—both of you. Come in with me, Effie; you have got a colour like a red rose: come, there is to be no

more racing to-night, so you need not stand hovering about Sydney," and I took her hand and turned her homewards.

Sydney alone amongst us still stood motionless. Would she be obstinate enough to let us go without her? Well, as to her obstinacy, I know not how far that might have carried her; but, while I wondered, suddenly the question of going or remaining was decided for her. Mr. Rupert stepped to her side.

"Come in," he said quietly, and he drew her hand within his arm.

"But it is a shame!" she exclaimed, half irritated: "I can't bear to be indoors on such a night."

"Well, come and get a cloak, and I will walk with you till midnight," he answered laughing.

That was a threat that put an effectual stop to her resistance: she took her hand away from his arm, but she walked back to the house, and she let him walk beside her without another audible murmur. For my part, I did not interrupt them any further by my presence, but for the remainder

y kept myself and Effie in their rear.
z they had together, or whether they
ll, I do not know. In fact, Effie contrived
th my ear and my attention engaged—
at any time full employment for one
ntil our walk was ended.

CHAPTER XVII.

A HOT DAY.

THE expected letter came next day from Mr. Kingsley, and, as we had anticipated, it bade us look for him that same evening. Sydney sighed as the announcement of this nearly approaching advent was read aloud, but to all the other inmates of Riverston the news, I believe, brought more or less of satisfaction: even *I* had a small amount of interest and curiosity respecting Mr. Kingsley, sufficient to turn the balance of my mind in favour of his speedy coming.

“The truth is, that you don’t give credit to a word I have told you about him!” Sydney exclaimed half petulantly, as I chanced in the course of the morning to give expression to this feeling. “Well, take your own way: you will soon see whether I have exaggerated.”

"Exactly; that is what I am curious to know. But now, are you coming with us or not?—because we don't want to stand here," for it was in the hall that we had met, as Effie and I were preparing to take our afternoon's stroll.

"I don't know: will you lie under a tree?"

"We will deposit *you* under one if you like. But what is the matter with you? Why can't you walk?"

"I have got a headache: it is so hot."

"It is hot, certainly! Well, come along: we will find a shady place for you. Have you been alone all the morning?"

"Yes—I was painting."

"Where is Mr. Rupert?"

"Papa and he are together. Papa has taken him to get his advice about cutting down those trees. Grim!" and Sydney stopped short, "what are you doing there? Come—Grim—Grim!—Why don't you come when you are called, sir?"

It was certainly no general fault of Grim's to refrain from coming when he was called; his more

ordinary failing was, that he came whether called or not. He was a small wiry Scotch terrier belonging to Sydney—an especial pet of hers—one of two treasures (the other was an *Æolian* harp) which she had brought with her from Edinburgh. He had received this designation of “Grim” in his puppyhood, from possessing a singularly insalubrious physiognomy, and the opprobrious epithet had stuck to him through life. He was a starched, wiry, uncompromising little terrier: there was no coming round Grim on his weak side; attentions were wasted on him; flattery and caresses were alike thrown away: throughout his existence he was said to have looked on life with a solemn eye, and to have performed his part in it with a grave, not to say sour, decorum. He had had other masters and mistresses in his day, but they had passed and been forgotten; his present mistress was now his sole concern and care, and with her, to all appearance, he was satisfied: certain it is, that all the small portion of dog-affection that Grim’s undemonstrative nature permitted him to display was conveyed in one lot and parcel to Sydney:

scarcely so much as a friendly wag of the tail was reserved for any other creature—man or woman—at Riverston. And Sydney, who, had it been possible, would have been first with every living thing, loved the dog who had chosen her for his sole friend.

“Grim, Grim! why don’t you come? You foolish old fellow, to lie broiling there till you are so hot that you can’t move! Grim, I say, why don’t you come?”

Very lazily and drowsily at last he came, following in Sydney’s steps with trailing tail and pendant tongue.

“I think he has got a headache,” Effie said.

“No doubt he has. Poor Grim! you are not used to such summers in your own land, are you? Frosts and snows are what suit you. It is a bad business, this sunshine—isn’t it?” and Sydney stooped down to pat his rough grey head.

I had never yet known Grim resist the touch of Sydney’s hand, but to-day he did: as he felt her caress a low growl came from him. I did not like the sound of it.

"Let him alone, Sydney: he is not in a good state."

"Nonsense! he is only hot and cross. Grim has a temper."

"The more reason that you should be careful with him."

"But he never snaps, Honor: he is perfectly harmless."

"Well, don't touch him, at any rate: there—he is going off—now, don't call him back, Sydney."

"Why, what a little coward you are! Do you know, Honor, I always gave you credit for the bravery of a lioness."

"Did you?"

"I always imagined that, in cases of danger, you would have been a perfect heroine."

"Is this a case of danger?"

"You seem to think it so"—laughing.

"If I did, you may be very certain Grim should not have gone off just now alone."

"Ah, there is the true heroine's tone! I thought an accusation of cowardice would bring it out. You little piece of iron! You morsel of deception,

looking as if a puff of wind would blow you away ! Honor, I wonder you never feel ashamed of walking so like a lie through life !”

“ If I was created a lie, how can I help myself ?”

“ You look like something one would put in a hothouse, and only keep alive with perfumes and sunshine.”

“ I warn you against attempting that course of treatment: I should break the hothouse windows.”

“ I know you would—especially those at the east end. You would let in a gust of wind that would kill every other living thing there but yourself. But it would be meat and drink to you. Honor;”—abruptly, “ I should like to know how many storms you had weathered in your lifetime ?”

“ Why ?—do I look storm-beaten ?”

“ Storm-beaten ! Atom of vanity ! Come—how many ?”

“ I had a long voyage once,” I answered, after a moment, but more gravely than she had asked the question ; “ where storms were about me day by

day, and I was left to fight my way through them, or to perish in them—as I could ; now I have come into harbour and furled my sails. I almost fear they may be rotten when I have to hoist them and weigh anchor again.”

“ You shall not hoist them ; let them lie by and rot into powder, if they choose ! ” Sydney cried. “ Do you think we would let you go ? Do you think we would send you out on the wide sea again, you poor white bird ? ” and, half in earnest, half in jest, she caressingly clasped her hands about my arm. But I shook my head.

“ Not even the smallest craft was made to lie all its days sheltered in harbour, Sydney. Somewhere I shall steer presently, if I live—God knows where ! ”

“ No—Honor, dear ! ”

“ Yes, Sydney ! You foolish child, don’t try to believe that Riverston can be my resting-place for more than a few years at the utmost. If you will keep me till Effie’s school-days are over, I will stay with you gladly, but when they close so does my life here.”

We walked on for a few moments in silence.

"Ah! you will marry—that will be the end of it," she said, at last.

"That is very uncertain; the majority of governesses do not marry."

"You are much like the majority of governesses, certainly!"

"My position in society is."

"Not your position *here*, Honor."

"No, my darling—bless you all for it! But still your kindness cannot raise me in the world's eyes."

"Hold your tongue about the world's eyes! Do you think no people have eyes of their own?"

"Hold *your* tongue about the whole matter, Sydney. And, if you please, do not be imagining matches for me; for I tell you beforehand that your schemes would be thrown away."

"Do you think *I* would interfere with your love matters, you little spitfire? Not but that I *should* like to see you in love—heartily!"

"There would be little to *see*—trust me for that, Sydney."

"Ay—I suppose you would take care of that.

Honor, *I* should not like to be in love with you!"

"I should not think you would."

"You would be so cruel. With your witch ways you would go leading me on and on—making me lay every thing I had in the world, and myself with it, down at your feet, and the whole time I should never be able to know whether you would not laugh in my face at the end of it."

"You are wrong, Sydney."

"Am I? Well—perhaps you would not laugh, but you would shake me off when the time came, as pitilessly as though the rending of all my heart's fibres was of no more moment to you than the snapping of so many threads."

"Again you are wrong."

"Am I unjust?" playfully, and with the caressing hands about my arm again. "Well—I imagine all kinds of odd fancies about you. Tell me something true of yourself? I wish you would."

"Read the truth for yourself, Sydney. It would be easy enough if you would leave off perplexing

yourself with your strange methods of proceeding. The pages are all numbered and arranged ; but how can you hope to understand them if you turn them upside down, and read them backwards ? ”

“ Is that what I do ? ”

She was silent for a few moments ; then looked up and shook her head.

“ The pages may be numbered, and I may read them as they lie ; but the book is a mysterious book still to me. Arguments won’t lighten my darkness, Honor. Never mind—let me go stumbling on—I like it. As long as you seem to stand half-shrouded, there is excitement in piercing into what is hidden ; possibly if you were all discovered—like a revealed mystery—your charm would be gone. Let me be, Honor—I like to work my own way into you.”

“ Work away, then, and grope in your imaginary darkness while you can ; for perhaps, when the light breaks on you, it will show you only a waste field where your fancy pictured a rich garden.”

“ No—rather it will show me high mountain peaks, to which I cannot climb ; deep valleys, into

which I can only longingly gaze ; streams, whose beds lie hidden where no eye of mine can pierce."

With sudden emotion her dark eyes swam in tears ; her arms were lifted and thrown about my neck, she pressed my cheek to hers, she set her lips to mine in a close passionate kiss. I put her from me ; to be valued above what I deserve, is pain not pleasure to me.

"Sydney, if height and depth were to be measured between us two, it would not be to *me* that the palm would be given. You have powers that I have not ; emotions and aspirations that, put beside mine, would dwarf some of my mountain peaks to molehills. You are purer and simpler and nobler than I ; with all your faults nearer heaven, and further from hell. Now, hold your peace ! We began in jest and have finished in earnest. You wanted me to tell you something true about myself. I tell you this—that you are better than I am : it is the truest thing I have to tell you. And, believing it or not, hold your tongue."

We had been walking slowly, and were scarcely a quarter of a mile yet from the house ; but, as

Sydney's head ached, I did not take her further. The green shaded grass below the trees looked tempting; she lay down presently, tossing back her hair to let the air blow on her bared temples, and there Effie and I left her, for one of those frequent erratic rambles together in which my pupil's wild young spirit took delight. As usual, however, she wearied me out to-day, while she herself was still in full vigour and freshness; and leaving her, at length, to work out the rest of her superfluous energy alone, I again returned to where we had parted from Sydney, and, finding her asleep, took a seat quietly by her side.

For a quarter of an hour no sound except the hum of summer life came near us; it was, as I said, a sultry day, and the breeze scarcely stirred the branches. Sydney slept without a movement: even my own eyes after a time, as I leant back against the great oak trunk, were beginning partially to yield to the influence of the drowsiness around me—when on the sudden my dreamy mood was startlingly broken, and Sydney's sleep as rudely dispelled, by the abrupt breaking forth

of a wild, sharp cry. It came in Effie's voice : with one simultaneous shock of alarm we both sprang to our feet ; in one quick instant the whole matter had painted itself before us.

Effie stood alone on the green slope of the hill ; for her the worst was already either effected or escaped from—*which* we could not tell ; but for us the danger was to come, and it was imminent. Snorting, panting, furiously biting at the air, Sydney's terrier dog was blindly rushing towards us, its mouth white with foam, its body writhing, its glassy, starting, terrified eyes bloodshot : what had come over it we did not need to ask each other : once before my eyes had seen such a sight : one swift, terror-struck instant brought the truth to us—that the dog was mad.

I think, if we had sprung quickly aside, it might possibly have passed without attacking us—its wild race seemed so blindly run ; but, alarmed as we were, escape for ourselves was certainly at that moment not our first thought ; *that*, urged by a swift remorseful fancy of conscience—God knows the bitterness of that pang, flinging, as it did, its

agony over the uncertainty of my child Effie's fate!—was to stop its course at all hazards, if by any means whatsoever it was possible.

One instant only was ours : ere we had time to prepare for him he was close upon us. We both had our hands ungloved ; to cover them was the first most indispensable thing, yet to do so except in the rudest manner was impossible. I tore off the shawl I wore and flung it about one of mine—not an instant had I to do more—the creature was at my side ; I stooped and darted on him, and, with the strongest gripe I ever laid on any living thing, I caught him on his shaggy back and held him down, howling, with hand and knee.

“ Honor, what *are* we to do with him ? ”

“ God knows ! ”

This was all we spoke.

I had to bend over him to hold him, and as I bent the animal suddenly flung up its head, and I felt my face in an instant spattered with the poisonous saliva from its white lips. So far as I myself was concerned, this was the only moment

when my danger pressed keenly on me: in that sudden agony I almost loosed my hold; my fingers had even began to unclasp, when the spring the creature tried to make recalled me to my senses: with new force I grasped at him; I wiped the deadly moisture from my face, throwing my dress over my disengaged hand; then, springing up, I held him struggling and writhing in the air.

“Give him to me: I am strongest.”

Short and sharp came Sydney's words; the voice so changed from its accustomed silver music that its tone fell strangely on my ear.

“Keep back a minute yet—I can hold him.”

She held back, ready prepared; as we stood so, Effie's voice came to us.

“Miss Haig, what is it? Oh! Sydney, what is it?”

“Effie, did he touch you?”

“I was patting him, and he snapped at me.”

“Did his teeth touch you?”

“No—he only tore my sleeve.”

“Effie, my darling, run in-doors and send some one to us. Quick! Now, Sydney!”

I gave the creature up to her; I leant back against a tree; the struggle had only lasted for one minute, and my strength was exhausted already. To hold him till help came, or even to carry him between us to the house, I knew to be all but impossible.

There was a pause that to my strained nerves seemed long, though its duration could not have been many seconds: at the close of it my eyes and Sydney's met. Marble still and white she was, but the unuttered agony of that look of hers I have never forgotten: I knew, as I glanced on her, that the same thought had come into both our minds.

She had opened her lips to speak; the words that, before many moments had passed, *must* have been spoken by one or other of us, were almost uttered: suddenly, in that last instant's silence, there came a sound—a cry fell on our ears. It was distant, far off behind us; but it was a signal of human help. We heard; and swift at its first faint utterance I turned: then my voice too rose in a cry of joy, for he who came near was Mr. Rupert.

There was hope now—there was certainty even of relief, could we hold out. I went to Sydney's side, and together we gathered up our remaining strength. On William Rupert came with winged steps; yet that strength was used almost to its last grain and fibre before he reached us. When at last he came, neither of our lips had power left to speak.

He, too, had no time for words. In silence he seized the writhing animal from our fainting grasp; then *our* task was over; I saw no more. The pause that followed was broken once by one single cry, almost human in its agony; after that there was no other sound: we were left alone for two or three moments more; then Mr. Rupert returned to us, empty-handed.

Neither change nor relief had come to Sydney's look till now; the marble face had stayed fixed; but now it altered,—it all began to waken up into a strange tremor. As Mr. Rupert stood before her—he himself not without agitation—she raised her eyes; then suddenly she stretched out both her hands to him. She spoke, too. “Oh, William!”

she sobbed hysterically—and one moment I saw her so—those offered hands held fast in his; then—and well might I open my eyes wide to assure myself that they saw aright—she was weeping as if her heart would break, with her face lying upon his arm.

“She will be the better for some sal-volatile,” I said quietly; “I will go and get her some,”—and I went. When, after a quarter of an hour, I returned, I found the scene considerably changed. Sydney was sitting on a bench alone, with eyes upon the ground, not crying now, but very silent and very shy: Mr. Rupert was away from her some dozen paces, bending over the mutilated remains of poor Grim. He, however, on my approach rejoined us, and began to talk readily enough; asking questions concerning our late adventure, in a tone at first grave and anxious, until the particulars of the capture, as I detailed them one by one with as little seriousness as I could assume,—for it was an object with me to make the matter less tragic if I could in Sydney’s eyes—brought first a flickering smile, and finally an irrepressible laugh, to his lips.

"And meanwhile, Miss Haig," he said, when my narration was finished, "you look exceedingly as if you were going to faint. Do not stay here any longer : come in, both of you."

He spoke as though he meant to accompany us himself ; he came, too, in another moment to Sydney's side, and stooped to offer her his arm ; but I had watched her face as he came near, and something in its expression as I looked caused me to interfere.

"Never mind Sydney—I will take her home," I said. "There is Robert coming, Mr. Rupert ; will you stay and tell him what to do with poor Grim's remains ? Now Sydney, come."

I took her hand and drew it within my arm : without a word I carried her home. Quite subdued she let me take her to her room, and obeying my command she lay down upon her bed. There, as I was on the point of leaving her, she at last looked up with a feeble, piteous effort at a smile.

"What an attempt to be a heroine ! Are you quite ashamed of me, Honor ?"

"You had better go to sleep before you make a simpleton of yourself," was my curt response; and I closed her eyelids with my lips, and left her.

END OF VOL. I.

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